

RITUAL AND MORAL EDUCATION:  
A CONFUCIAN CONTRIBUTION

by  
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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation argues that an element of classical Confucianism, the notion of ritual (*li* 禮), can make substantial contributions to contemporary work in moral education. Specifically, I argue that one of the most plausible contemporary theories of learning and development, that of Lev Vygotsky, is insufficient to provide an approach to moral education on its own. It is, however, a viable starting point for developing such an approach and also helpful for conceptualizing the role that ritual plays in the Confucianism. In turn, this understanding of ritual can supplement the basic Vygotskian account and assist with design of moral education programs.

For Betsy and Carina.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vii
Chapters	
1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
2. MORAL EDUCATION, NATIVISM, AND VYGOTSKY.....	20
2.1 Nativism.....	22
2.2 The problems of nativism .....	25
2.3 Vygotsky alongside theory of learning in current philosophy.....	35
2.4 The Vygotskian account and its viability as a theory of learning .....	40
2.5 Moral development: an unfinished account.....	45
2.6 Problems for moral development in the Vygotskian model .....	49
2.7 Prospective resolutions to the theoretical gap.....	53
2.8 Conclusion .....	62
3. CONFUCIAN RITUAL, A DEFINITION .....	63
3.1 Distinguishing notions of ritual in Confucianism.....	64
3.2 Ritual prescriptions: performances and divisions .....	69
3.3 Contrast between ritual and similar concepts .....	77
3.4 Ritual as a prescription for respect and related humane dispositions .....	81
3.5 Conclusion .....	87
4. CONFUCIAN RITUAL, FUNCTIONALITY .....	89
4.1 Is Xunzi's position on learning really akin to Vygotsky's?.....	89
4.2 Developing (moral) competency.....	95
4.3 Xunzi's account of human psychology and the necessity of ritual.....	99
4.4 Ritual as a harmonizer of inner states .....	107
4.5 Ritual as a means of assessing and regulating the sense of approval .....	113
4.6 Grounding out in habituation? .....	125
4.7 Conclusion .....	130
5. RITUAL AND MORAL EDUCATION .....	131

5.1 Recap: Tappan's gap .....	131
5.2 Filling the gap: ritual's role.....	135
5.3 Distinguishing the Confucian position.....	148
5.4 Relevant findings in modern developmental theory and research .....	155
5.5 Is it anything new? .....	159
5.6 Conclusion .....	164
6. A DEFENSE OF RITUAL'S VIABILITY.....	165
6.1 Recapitulation and direction .....	165
6.2 Ritual's distinct function.....	167
6.2.1 Discourse .....	168
6.2.2 Stories .....	171
6.2.3 Games .....	175
6.2.4 Etiquette.....	183
6.3 Xunzi's account of human psychology and the necessity of ritual.....	187
6.4 Ritual as a harmonizer of inner states .....	204
6.5 Conclusion .....	209
7. CONCLUSION.....	211
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	222

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Have you ever been bullied, cheated, or generally disrespected? These sorts of behaviors are frequently harmful and always unethical, and it is only natural that we seek methods of reducing or eliminating them. To this end, and over the past several decades, schools have begun to invest in programs in moral education.<sup>1</sup> Moral education programs involve the inculcation of particular dispositions and skill sets designed to assist in and resolve common social conflicts as simple as sharing and as weighty as drug abuse. The Institute of Education Sciences website describes this sort of education in terms of the influence that families, schools, and other social institutions have on the positive character development of children and adults, where character is understood as “the moral and ethical qualities of persons as well as the demonstration of those qualities in their emotional responses, reasoning, and behavior.”

Programs in moral education may employ a number of methods and encompass a variety of settings, being pervasive throughout a community or being localized to particular classroom or extracurricular experiences. While it is unclear whether there is a consistent

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<sup>1</sup> A terminological point: throughout this project, I will use the phrase “moral education” to refer to any program focused on enhancing moral development broadly construed. I thus forego the distinction between moral education and *character* education that is prevalent in the education literature. My reason for doing so, which I will not defend here, is that, insofar as character education programs are often geared toward promoting promoral dispositions, character education is a particular approach to moral education, rather than a distinct project. For a contrasting position, see Althof and Berkowitz (2006).

underlying theory or vision for what these moral education programs might look like, programs deployed thus far have met with at least marginal success.<sup>2</sup> Peer mediation, for example, is an increasingly popular sort of program due to initial successes in promoting conflict resolution and an overall reduction in reported conflicts over time (Bell et al. 2000). Students train to become “mediators” who help fellow students work through various personal and interpersonal conflicts. There is also empirical evidence supporting the claim that moral education programs have a positive effect on students. A study conducted across twenty elementary schools in Hawai’i (ten intervention schools, ten control schools) found that, compared with the control group, a program emphasizing character development employed in the intervention group resulted in a seventy percent reduction in suspensions and a fifteen percent reduction in absenteeism, along with improved test scores in the subjects of reading and mathematics (Snyder et al. 2010). These outcomes suggest that moral education benefits individual students socially and academically, as well as the school environment at large.

Research in moral education is necessarily interdisciplinary: in order to ensure that moral education is delivered effectively, our methods of instruction should align with our most recent empirical findings and sophisticated educational theories. To this end, moral education research makes use of the fields of psychology, education, and philosophy, among others.<sup>3</sup> Developmental and cognitive psychology have been invaluable to our collective understanding of how the brain processes morally salient experiences and

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<sup>2</sup> Lee and Taylor (2013) provide an overview of the variety of theories and techniques applied in moral education over the past forty years.

<sup>3</sup> Anthropology and sociology are two other notable fields with stakes in the moral education literature, although I will not focus upon them.

recruits them for psychosocial development. Education sciences have helped us to understand how best to deliver information to learners based partly upon findings in psychological research, but also based upon teacher and student experience. Finally, philosophy is an ancient origin point of moral education research, and remains an interlocutor (albeit in a perhaps diminished capacity) in contemporary discussions of moral education. This dissertation is also interdisciplinary in its approach to moral education, but the tack I take is primarily philosophical in nature. Accordingly, it will be helpful to establish some of the history of moral education in philosophy and its current state of play.

In the Western tradition, theorizing about moral education, at least in any rigorous sense, is typically thought to find its start in the fourth and third centuries BCE with the works of Plato and, perhaps more importantly, Aristotle. The Aristotelian moral education project in particular, covered in detail by the *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Eudemian Ethics* (and, to a much lesser extent, in the final book of *Politics*), lays out a program for moral development that focuses upon the cultivation of ethical dispositions (virtues) alongside practical wisdom (*phronesis*). This program, perhaps most accurately described as a moral training regimen, emphasizes habituation, practice, and model emulation as means of developing the basic dispositions and reflective capacity necessary for cultivating strict and complete virtue. Aristotle's moral education strikes a balance between promoral affective capacities on the one hand, and rational capacities on the other.

It is perhaps ironic, then, that theories of morality that developed subsequently focused increasingly upon rational capacities and less so on affective ones.<sup>4</sup> While Aristotle

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<sup>4</sup> This is not to suggest that affective reactions were absent from discussions of morality in a post-Aristotelian world. Humean sentimentalism is naturally concerned with the sentiments as a source of moral judgment. Rousseau's famous treatise *Emile* also undertakes to discuss moral education in retaining the innate goodness of humans, and also addresses the intersection of reason and passion in moral behavior. My point

venerated rationality as the core and defining feature of humanity, it was the early modern philosophers who, arguably, truly placed rationality at center stage in their ethical thought. The deontological and utilitarian/consequentialist ethical traditions, typically represented by Kant and Mill, respectively, shifted focus largely (if not entirely) away from the virtue ethics of Aristotle and onto abstract moral principles. These ethical positions look to assign moral goodness based not upon the cultivation of character traits, but upon the goodness of principles or positive effects of subsequent outcomes of actions. Since such attributions of goodness are contingent upon rational faculties, rather than emotional ones, rationality became the focal point of research in normative ethics in 20<sup>th</sup>-century philosophy.

Such philosophical views have arguably influenced subsequent theorizing in the psychological sciences regarding what is or is not included in the development of moral judgment (Kristjansson 2006, 38). Lawrence Kohlberg (1973), well known for his extension of Jean Piaget's work in developmental psychology, is exemplary of this claim. Kohlberg posited a stage theory of moral development, one that begins with egoism oriented around reward and punishment, and ends with the development of a principled conscience that grasps and deploys concepts such as integrity, autonomy, justice, and other abstract ethical rules. This Kohlbergian view treats moral development as primarily being a feature or offshoot of rational development in general. Accordingly, work in moral education began to focus its efforts on inculcating understanding and awareness of the sorts of principles that Kohlberg placed at the pinnacle of moral development.

This all leads to an interesting point: for a large part of human history, thought on

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here, however, is to point out a noticeable shift in thought over the course of the history of philosophy of ethics, one that moves farther away from an emphasis on the affective and toward an emphasis on rationality.

moral education in philosophy and in the relevant sciences has been roughly synchronous, with philosophy arguably serving as a foundational resource for the sciences. Indeed, even John Dewey, regarded by history as both a philosopher and psychologist and one of the foremost advocates of moral education in public schools, was arguably primarily a philosopher and secondarily a scientist.<sup>5</sup> It is reasonable to assert that, for many years, it was philosophy that led the way in developing a science of moral education.

Recently, however, there has been an apparent inversion of these roles and functions. While dominant for many years, rationalist accounts of moral development have not been without criticism and, over the last four decades, began to receive substantive pushback from a number of sources. Some critics have argued that Kohlberg's stages do not adequately represent a plurality of ethical perspectives, being designed around only a particular collection of ethical institutions that might be andro- and/or Eurocentric.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, it has been noted that Kohlberg's account suggests that, as humans progress through the moral stages, there should be increasing consistency in how judgments are made, with no backsliding between stages. This, however, runs counter to observed decision/judgment making behavior in moral scenarios.<sup>7</sup> Finally, and most recently, alternative models of moral judgment, such as social intuitionism, have been offered to explain the fact that, according to neurological data, humans appear to make moral judgments much more rapidly than would allow for considerations of the abstract

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, *Moral Principles in Education* (1909).

<sup>6</sup> Carol Gilligan (1982) and Harkness, Edwards, and Super (1981) both run this line of critique.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Parke, Gauvain, and Schmuckler (2010).

principles that Kohlberg suggests are central to moral reasoning.<sup>8</sup> The upshot of such findings is that a Kohlbergian, rationalist account of moral development is at best incapable of explaining all facets of moral psychology and, at worst, simply wrong.

Ultimately, this has led research in moral education away from rationalism and appeal to abstract principles, and back toward the virtue ethics traditions with which moral education theorists began. As Kristjan Kristjansson (2006) observes:

The last two decades have witnessed a burgeoning literature on role-modelling—that is, the emulation of role models or ‘moral exemplars’—as a didactic strategy in moral education. Much of this literature hails from the movement of character education, which has recently gained considerable prominence, especially in the USA. Driving this movement is the belief that the Kohlbergian stress on cognitive skills in moral education, as well as the ultra-liberal conception of such education as a mere exercise in values clarification, have failed to hit the mark—have failed to deliver the ultimate prize of moral education, which is to make students good. To rectify this shortcoming, children must be taught about right and wrong in a more straightforward manner, moral virtue must seep into them from an early age like dye into wool, and they must, *inter alia*, learn to take their cue from worthy mentors and moral exemplars. (37)

These sorts of shifts have been instigated primarily by researchers in developmental and educational psychology, who have pushed for emphasizing nonrational features of moral development, such as character traits, alongside the rational, principled aspects of moral education. These proposals draw upon increasingly sophisticated accounts of moral development and moral psychology that are constantly undergoing criticism and further refinement,<sup>9</sup> and an overall increase in publications on the topic of moral education.<sup>10</sup> As a result, it is fair to say that research on moral education is rapidly evolving.

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Haidt (2001).

<sup>9</sup> Elliot Turiel’s (1983) “domain theory” of moral development is a good example.

<sup>10</sup> Lee and Taylor’s (2013) survey of the *Journal of Moral Education* (established in 1971) shows that roughly sixty percent of its articles were published in the last twenty years alone.

For whatever reason, there are relatively few contributions to these programs from contemporary philosophy. Despite ethics being a subject of longstanding interest for philosophers, much contemporary philosophical work in ethics is focused exclusively on normative projects, wherein the typical objective is to argue for the superiority of an ethical position (e.g., Kantianism, utilitarianism, etc.) rather than to devise a method for encouraging agents to adopt and enact these positions. My point is not to disparage such projects, but to suggest that philosophers *also* have a stake in moral education, since education is foundational to developing reliable moral actors. An investment by philosophy can also produce a critical analysis of current moral education programs, particularly their methods and underlying theories, and may help to better conceptualize and deploy these programs. Additionally, research on moral education and development can be used to better understand philosophical ideas regarding these topics. It seems natural, then, to engage in a philosophical assessment of moral education and take such projects seriously.

Recent philosophical works on moral education, however, tend to take the form of interpretive projects, or treat moral education as a subject of secondary interest.<sup>11</sup> Tim Sprod (2001) suggests that one reason for the decline in philosophical discussion of moral education may be the pluralistic nature of contemporary society, which makes it difficult to see just what, if anything, should be taught in moral education. This concern, Sprod argues, misunderstands a crucial fact: as the primary sources of education for society, schools will inevitably influence the outlooks of their students, academic *or* moral (1).

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<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Giesinger (2012) and Splitter (2011). There are, of course, exceptions to the trend. Nel Noddings's work in care ethics (2002, 2003, 2010) extends to the realm of education as well. Kristjan Kristjansson's (2006, 2012) interpretive accounts of moral education in Aristotle are also frequently intended as suggestions for means of improving current moral education programs.

There is, then, clear motivation for the adoption of programs in moral education; less clear is precisely *how* the education process itself is to proceed and what it should entail. Presumably, for an educational program to be effective, it must be compatible with human cognitive architecture.<sup>12</sup> This dissertation seeks to reinvigorate philosophy of moral education and contribute to extant theories of moral development in cognitive sciences. After examining empirically supported but incomplete theories of learning and development, particularly that of Lev Vygotsky, I recommend supplementing these positions with ideas abstracted from ancient Confucianism. Specifically, I introduce a novel approach to understanding how the Confucians intended ritual (*li* 禮) to be construed and utilized, based in part upon findings in contemporary moral development literature. I suggest that just as ritual education in the Confucian tradition can be explicated in terms of modern developmental theory, this notion of ritual can also serve as a viable resource for moral education, and that there is empirical support for this approach.

The project itself provides a largely novel contribution to philosophical work in moral education in drawing upon classical Confucianism and focusing on the tool of ritual in particular. According to Lee and Taylor (2013), for example, the *Journal of Moral Education* includes only four articles treating Confucianism as a subject of research in its forty-year history (408). While this journal represents only one venue for discussion of Confucianism in moral education (and is, moreover, an exclusively English-language publication), the dearth of relevant publications reflects a lack of interest in rigorous analysis of Confucian philosophy of moral education in general, let alone analysis of ritual

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<sup>12</sup> This is a project in which contemporary philosophers of science have become increasingly interested, a prime example of such a project being Kim Sterelny's (2012) apprentice learning model.



in particular. Furthermore, a number of discussions of Confucianism in the context of education that do occur turn primarily toward political cultural-historical topics (e.g., Chan 2004; Doan 2005; Lee and Ho 2005; Luhmer 1990; Xie and Ge 2013) without an extensive examination of Confucian philosophy in general or its particular features. Such research is helpful in advancing our understanding of the Confucian moral education tradition and demonstrates how Confucianism remains relevant in modernity. My point, though, is that research concerning how specific features of the Confucian moral education program might be adapted and utilized has been limited, and would benefit from focused and rigorous contributions, hence this project's focus on ritual.

To be sure, there are a number of scholars discussing moral education/cultivation in the Confucian tradition, some of whom even consider possible applications of Confucianism for moral education in the current era. These scholars, however, often write in broad strokes about the Confucian program, speaking at the general, abstract level regarding the aims of education in the classical tradition. Geir Helgesen (2003), for example, examines the central place given to moral education in the early school years of Korean children, noting both how and why the influence of the Confucian moral tradition has persisted into modernity. Helgesen does provide a critical survey of the Confucian philosophy underpinning the Korean education system but, due to the nature of the project, turns the reader's attention primarily to why such a tradition is important and how it might be adapted for an increasingly global community. A similar project is undertaken by Charlene Tan (2012), who critically assesses how Confucianism has been adopted as a moral tradition in Singapore schools and how a more careful analysis of Confucianism might yield improvements for Singapore's moral education programs. Tan's focus,

however, is particularly upon how the interests of the individual and the community are balanced in Confucian moral theory. This edges closer toward the sort of project in which this dissertation engages, but still provides little in the way of investigating the nature of the education process itself, or what distinctive resources the Confucian tradition offers in this regard. Finally, Xie Yuhan and Ge Chen (2013) discuss the relevance of Confucianism to understanding moral education in modern day China, briefly laying out some of the basic tenets of the Confucian morality and how they relate to the education process. Overall, however, Xie and Ge offer a philosophically thin account of Confucian moral cultivation and, notably, offer an impoverished notion of ritual (*li*) as mere “etiquette” while doing little to qualify the choice of translation. The project in which I engage is particularly relevant on this point, as it will seek to elucidate in greater detail both the nature of ritual in the Confucian tradition as well as how it functions as a tool for moral education.

It may come as no surprise, then, that there is even less English language research on ritual’s utility for moral education, with relatively few projects in recent history. One of these projects, undertaken by Richard Quantz (1997, 2011), looks to ritual as only a tool used to construct the space of practice for primary and secondary education, especially with regard to conveying “nonrational” knowledge (e.g., organizing with peers and teachers, behavior in formal as distinct from formal settings, etc.). Quantz’s purpose is to critique contemporary, goals-oriented pedagogy in U.S. public schools, favoring instead a “non-rational” pedagogy informed by a consideration of the strong role that ritualized action plays in student development.

A second, arguably more relevant, project is presented by Zhang Lingyang and Xie Ou (2015), who recommend utilizing ritual as a means of ensuring that moral education

programs bridge theory *and* practice, noting that ritual “promotes the construction of a shared space . . . for educatees and provides them with a full range of experiences out of the narrow individual realm into society and life,” and “concretizes abstract moral concepts in the practice of educatees” (225). Zhang and Xie, however, approach ritual from a sociological perspective rather than a philosophical one, and their discussion of the nature of ritual and educational theory is limited. They neither appeal extensively to developmental theory, nor do they provide a detailed account of ritual. Additionally, although Zhang and Xie briefly reference Confucianism, they do little to connect the Confucian account of ritual with their own position. These are all points on which this project will elaborate.

Having clarified how this dissertation fits with the present literature, it will help to provide readers with a brief description of its contents. The second chapter of this project attends to the state of theories of moral education in contemporary philosophy as well as how at least one theory in developmental psychology might serve as a starting point for novel contributions to moral education theory. I begin by evaluating discussions of moral psychology and its development in the context of debates regarding moral nativism in the philosophy of biology. Briefly, the debate over moral nativism questions whether humans possess some innate program or tendency for promoral thought and behavior. Nativists insist that such an innate program must exist in order to explain rapid moral development in young children, while nonnativists (e.g., social learning theorists) suggest that the acquisition of a moral perspective can be attributed to a number of external factors, especially one’s social environment. This debate is significant for our understanding of how to develop a moral education program, since advocates of moral education will want

to consult the most viable theories of learning and development. I review both sides of the debate and argue that the nativist position has important shortcomings that pose no difficulty for social learning positions. Moreover, the social learning accounts can successfully respond to the challenges raised by nativist critics.

Following this critical assessment, I look to how social learning theorists in philosophy might utilize developed and established theories of psychosocial development from the cognitive sciences. In particular, I consider Lev Vygotsky's so-called "social constructivism,"<sup>13</sup> an account of learning and development, as an approach that can undergird programs in moral education. Vygotsky emphasizes the role of the social in cognitive development and is skeptical of nativism: humans may have certain developmental predispositions, but they are relatively thin in terms of what content they provide for humans. This is a noteworthy feature of Vygotsky's account, as it provides a practical component absent from nativist and Piagetian/Kohlbergian lines of theorizing, namely the role that social interaction and cultural artifacts play in cognitive development.

While the amount of writing on Vygotsky and how he might be applied in the instruction of many topics is encouraging, little has been said regarding how the *moral* education in particular might proceed. Mark Tappan (1997) turns to Vygotsky's general notion of artifact- and peer-mediated learning to explain moral development. For Vygotsky, development of higher-order psychological processes entails a sort of skill mastery, in which "an operation that initially represents an external activity is reconstructed

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<sup>13</sup> It is important to clarify that "social constructivism" here refers *exclusively* to a theory of development and learning. Although the phrase is also used to describe schools of thought in fields such as epistemology, metaethics, and sociology, educational social constructivism is a distinct project. To avoid confusion, I will refer to the account as "Vygotsky's" or "Vygotskian" rather than as "social constructivism."

and begins to occur internally” (Vygotsky 1978, 56-7). This means that development is necessarily mediated by the acquisition and utilization of social tools. The most important tool for Vygotsky, Tappan notes, is language: verbal language, as the primary means of communication for humans, is the primary developmental tool for transmitting information from adults to children. Upon being internalized and appropriated, language fundamentally transforms thought, becoming the manner in which thought is organized (Tappan 1997, 94-5). On an intrapersonal level, this amounts to what Vygotsky referred to as “inner” or “egocentric speech,” which provides a form of shorthand for organizing thought (Vygotsky 1986, 243-4). Language permits effective communication between people, which in turn allows for exchanges of information of various natures (moral, scientific, etc.).

According to Tappan, the linguistic component of Vygotsky’s developmental theory can be harnessed to explain the *moral* component of psychosocial development. Following some elaboration, I critically evaluate the account and raise several issues for Tappan’s Vygotskian approach. In particular, I examine the insufficiency of the language-based account with regard to the development of moral competence: moral competence requires that an individual be capable of reliably comprehending and following moral prescriptions; it entails that an individual understands and does what he or she *should* do. Since competent language users can be morally deficient (even vile), linguistic competence, in contrast, might be thought of as only giving practitioners some idea of what they *can* say or communicate. Although both natural language and morality constrain and prescribe certain kinds of behavior, they do so to different degrees and require significantly different developmental inputs (i.e., the social experiences required for a learner to

cultivate competence in a particular skill or set of skills).<sup>14</sup> As it stands, Tappan's view is implausible: language cannot provide learners with all the resources required for moral competence. The chapter closes with a prospective consideration of how these problems might be addressed, turning to current research in socialization theory and suggesting alternative sociocultural artifacts that can supplement moral education.

The third chapter, following the idea that a Vygotskian approach to moral education such as Tappan's requires a particular type of sociocultural tool to be effective, introduces a potential resource found in ancient Confucian thought, namely ritual. Before utilizing ritual as a resource for moral development, however, the term requires clarification. The character typically rendered as "ritual," 禮 (*li*), has a number of potential meanings, "ritual" simply being the most common translation. Additionally, despite being discussed in abundance, the Confucians never provide a concise definition of the term. It is necessary for this project, then, to provide a defensible interpretation of ritual. The account here proceeds in four phases. First, I distinguish between two conceptions of ritual in Confucianism: ritual as a prescription and ritual as a disposition. Second, I explain how the prescriptive notion pertains to certain performances and social divisions. Third, I contrast ritual with other recurring concepts in Confucianism that might be thought to play a similar role in moral development (e.g., laws, punishments, etc.). Fourth, I recommend that Confucian ritual be understood as those prescriptions governing the practices and standards that embody expressions of respect and related, prosocial, promoral attitudes.

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<sup>14</sup> To clarify the can-should distinction: language is not goal (or end) oriented in the same way as morality. For example, one who makes a rude, derogatory, or otherwise hurtful remark would not be regarded as linguistically incompetent; they have violated no rules of language. Such a person would, however, be considered morally incompetent. Similarly, with language one may violate rules, like syntax, for poetic purposes; violations of moral rules, however, are not permissible (even for aesthetic purposes).

In the fourth chapter, I discuss ritual's role in the inculcation of promoral dispositions. Specifically, ritual enables individuals to organize, understand, and cope with their own attitudes and other affective states. Recall that the Vygotskian approach suggests that psychosocial development is *interactive* in the sense that the learner is constantly internalizing and deploying ways of thinking and behaving that are first experienced via socialization with other human beings. This process is mediated through sociocultural tools or artifacts (such as language) that are incorporated into and help to structure a learner's cognitive architecture. My suggestion, which I elaborate over the subsequent chapters, is that the notion of ritual taken from the Confucian tradition can serve as such a tool or artifact specifically with regard to the development of promoral dispositions. Using the Confucian ideal of intrapersonal harmony as a focal point, I argue that ritual is regarded by the Confucians as a sociocultural artifact intended to bring about a promoral psychology. At least one Confucian, Xunzi, explicitly conceives of ritual study and practice as a means of restructuring a learner's moral psychology in much the same way that Vygotsky suggests that tools such as language modify a learner's cognitive architecture in psychosocial development. As a result, the Confucian notion of ritual in moral education should be compatible with the general account of learning offered by Vygotsky.

By developing the comparison with the Vygotskian position, I hope to further clarify the Confucian ritual education model. In particular, I focus upon how both Xunzi and Vygotsky regard the educational process as fundamentally transformative, providing learners with tools that alter the nature of the learner's thought. For Vygotsky, this is exemplified in the acquisition of tools such as language and scientific method; for Xunzi, it regards how ritual prescriptions inculcate promoral attitudes and dispositions.

The fifth chapter explicates how a version of the ritual program, abstracted from Confucianism, can supplement Tappan's Vygotskian account of moral education. Ritual serves a role similar to (but distinct from) that of language in Vygotsky's model by providing a sociocultural tool that becomes internalized and mastered by learner-practitioners. As suggested earlier, one might say that ritual's function is to provide individuals with a sort of moral language by which to assess, organize, and express their feelings; ritual provides standards that can be used to coordinate one's feelings and actions with those of others. Ritual can coordinate social behavior between humans and deal with emotional conflicts within. This is akin to how Vygotsky's notion of language in general, and inner speech in particular, can be used to organize thought (especially deliberation). Given the plausibility of the Vygotskian account of learning,<sup>15</sup> there appears to be a clear place for ritual. Additionally, this section will emphasize how the ritual program can further amend Tappan's Vygotskian approach by addressing some of the issues discussed in the first chapter. Specifically, whereas language appears insufficient to prescribe or constrain both moral action and attitudes, and is thus insufficient to inculcate moral skill, ritual requires practitioners to develop certain capacities, such as awareness of the mental states of others and empathy/sympathy, in order to inform proper moral judgment and action.

This notion of ritual retains many features of the account attributed to Confucianism, wherein ritual includes those prescriptions that guide and structure the performances that embody and express respect and related attitudes. It is necessary, however, to abstract a general notion of what ritual *is* (and what it *does*) that can be applied

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<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Bruner (1966), Wood et al. (1976), Wertsch (1985), Ruffman et al. (1998), and Garzotto (2007).



across multiple social contexts. First, the notion of ritual adopted need not require one to follow the specific rituals of the Confucians, let alone the entirety of the Confucian moral project. We can still talk about rituals in the prescriptive sense without being adherents to Confucian traditions, so this understanding of ritual is congenial to, but also separable from, Confucianism. As such, discussions of ritual via Confucianism provided in this chapter should be looked upon not as endorsements of the Confucian program wholesale, but as convenient means of elaborating upon the viability and applicability of ritual.

This chapter supports its claims regarding ritual's viability as a resource for moral development by looking at how such a program resonates with current work in psychosocial development. For example, recent findings suggest that moral development is facilitated by mediational aids such as visualization of morally charged scenarios, appeals to the learner's past experiences, and narratives that associate and elicit promoral emotional responses in social interactions. In light of such findings, it is plausible that incorporation of sociocultural artifacts into one's psychological architecture might be a necessary step for developing moral competence.

There is also evidence that priming and conditioning aids can increase the deployment frequency of promoral behavior, and this can be achieved through helping the individual develop a sensibility about the minds of others. According to Lagattuta and Weller (2014), moral development positively correlates with the capacity for awareness and understanding of others (387, 390, 399-400), meaning that increasing feelings of sympathy/empathy can lead to a more reliable display of moral behavior. Ritual can facilitate such development by helping develop a system for sharing an understanding of emotions and attitudes between individuals. In other words, ritual provides practitioners

with a means of “reading” the minds of others and, insofar as this is an intended purpose of the ritual, it presupposes that such minds exist and are worthy of acknowledgement (and, presumably, at least minimal consideration). Such findings, among others, suggest that a ritual program in moral education is well grounded empirically.

The sixth chapter addresses lingering concerns and limitations regarding the use of ritual as a resource for moral education. The types of concerns might be grouped along three general lines: 1) concerns regarding the distinct contributions of ritual, 2) concerns regarding whether ritual is deleterious to moral development, and 3) concerns regarding the efficacy of ritual as an instructional tool for moral education. This is not an exhaustive list of concerns, but it is sufficient to provide us with a starting point from which to evaluate the account of ritual that I have thus far provided.

One might be concerned, for example, that all of the argumentation from the preceding chapters leads to a moot point: various sociocultural tools are already employed to facilitate learning and development in general; it would come as a surprise if these resources could not be utilized for moral education in particular. In fact, tools such as parent-child discourse, morally charged stories, and even games can be (and are) used to help inculcate promoral attitudes. Although ritual was distinguished from certain other cultural constructs in the second chapter (e.g., laws, policies, punishments, etc.), these sorts of learning aids may come closer to filling the function for which rituals are apparently intended. One might question, then, whether an appeal to ritual as a sociocultural tool of development is redundant or, even worse, deleterious to an individual’s development when the learning environment is already equipped with a variety of instructional tools.

The aim of this chapter is to respond to these lines of concern. The first concern

requires consideration of the contrast between ritual and tools such as stories and games, one that distinguishes ritual by the nature of its functionality and also its specific aims. The further concerns about whether ritual is counterproductive and ritual's overall efficacy can be addressed by arguing that ritual, while not providing a magic bullet for moral education, can perform a useful function despite challenges posed by factors such as learner obstinacy that may vary with age and culture. Ultimately, I argue that, while ritual is not a *panacea* for moral education, it can safely fulfill a useful and distinct function in modernity.

In closing, I offer a prospective look at several lines of questioning that still need to be addressed: (1) How can rituals be employed to improve upon moral education? (2) How can we go about institutionalizing rituals and ritualizing classrooms? (3) How can we select or design rituals for moral education? Examining these questions will position us to launch future projects regarding ritual in moral education, including collaborative research with fields outside of philosophy. Accordingly, I also offer a sketch of how we might start to apply a ritualized approach to moral education in a culture such as our own.

## CHAPTER 2

### MORAL EDUCATION, NATIVISM, AND VYGOTSKY

Over the past few decades, United States schools have increasingly invested in moral and character education programs. These programs focus on inculcating skills and dispositions that can assist in resolving common conflicts among youth ranging from sharing to drug abuse. The Institute of Education Sciences website describes this education in terms of the influence that families, schools, and other social institutions have on the positive character development of children and adults, where character consists in “the moral and ethical qualities of persons as well as the demonstration of those qualities in their emotional responses, reasoning, and behavior.” The programs employ a number of methods and encompass a variety of settings, and may be pervasive throughout a community or localized to particular classroom or extracurricular experiences.

While it is unclear whether there is a consistent underlying theory or vision for what these moral education programs might look like, many have met with at least marginal success.<sup>16</sup> Peer mediation, for example, is an increasingly popular program in high schools: students train to become “mediators” who help fellow students work through various personal and interpersonal conflicts. There is also support for the claim that moral

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<sup>16</sup> Thomas Lickona (1996) has attempted to develop an outline for principles that character education programs should look to, although it is unclear whether all or most programs currently in use actually subscribe to these principles as guidelines for development. James S. Leming (2000), however, has suggested that many such programs lack even underlying theoretical bases, let alone unified designs (413-4).

education programs have positive effects on students. A study conducted across twenty primary schools in Hawai'i found that a program emphasizing character development resulted in a seventy percent reduction in suspensions, a fifteen percent reduction in absenteeism, and improved performance on reading and mathematics tests (Snyder et al. 2010). Another study, conducted over a period of twenty years at Orem High School in Provo, Utah, also reported great success in terms of both the character development and academic progress of the subjects. This study took a different approach to moral education, attempting to fold character-building practices into academic lessons (Williams et al. 2003). Despite having different theoretical foundations, these outcomes suggest that moral education provides tangible benefits both to students and the school environment at large.

There is, then, motivation for the adoption of moral education programs; less clear is precisely *how* the education process itself is to proceed and what it should entail. Presumably, for an educational program of any sort to be effective, it must be compatible with human cognitive architecture. Necessarily, then, advocates of moral education will want to consult the most viable theories of learning and development. At present, however, it is unclear exactly how we should construe our empirical findings regarding moral development.<sup>17</sup> Typically, interpreters fall into one of two camps: nativists and social learning theorists.<sup>18</sup> In what follows, I assess several contemporary representations of and

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<sup>17</sup> As Larry Nucci and Eliot Turiel (2009) note, recent approaches to character education programs have been haphazard, borne of a “premature application of research findings from developmental psychology to classroom practices,” and “the underestimation of the complexity of interactions between development in students’ social and moral understandings and their applications in social contexts” (151-2).

<sup>18</sup> For the purposes of this project, “social learning” will be used in a broad and general sense, and not refer exclusively to the explicitly titled social learning theory developed by Albert Bandura (1963).

arguments for moral nativism.<sup>19</sup> I argue that nativists underplay the empirical and theoretical weaknesses faced by nativism and overstate the problems faced by social learning theories. I suggest that, even if some weak nativist claims are plausible, they are insufficient to guide theory and policy for moral education; social learning theories are necessary at least in a supplementary capacity. I propose turning to one such theory in particular, Lev Vygotsky's so-called "social constructivism,"<sup>20</sup> as a viable and fruitful theory of learning and development. I examine how a Vygotskian approach might be expanded to provide an account of moral development, and how such an account might undergird programs in moral education. Following a critical evaluation, several problems for this Vygotskian approach are raised before considering how it might be amended.

## 2.1 Nativism

Moral nativism holds that moral competence is based largely or wholly upon innate faculties in human cognitive architecture.<sup>21</sup> Over the course of a human's growth and development, these faculties blossom into fully fledged resources for moral thought and action. If the blueprints for morality are already in humans, then it might be argued that emphasizing moral education, at least as traditionally construed, may be unnecessary.

The motivations to adopt moral nativism are varied; at least among philosophers, two recurring motivators are a perceived usefulness of an evolutionary account of human

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<sup>19</sup> I am by no means the first to make such an endeavor. For an example of a critique of recent contributions to moral nativism, see Sterelny (2010).

<sup>20</sup> The social constructivism discussed herein refers *exclusively* to a psychosocial theory of development and learning. Although the phrase is also used to classify theories in fields such as epistemology and sociology, educational social constructivism is a distinct project. To avoid confusion, I will refer to the account as being Vygotsky's (or Vygotskian) rather than as social constructivism.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Cosmides and Tooby (1992), as well as Simpson (2005).

psychology and a perceived necessity of accounting for seemingly rapid moral development over the course of a human's youth. The former is derived from a growing consensus that morality is in some sense built into human biology,<sup>22</sup> and this has led some to theorize that, if there is a biological grounding for moral development, then there must be an evolutionary explanation for morality. Richard Joyce (2006), for example, argues that an evolved capacity for reciprocity undergirds human morality. Joyce claims that evolution has refined in humans what are more brutish traits of nonhuman animals, specifically "reciprocal altruism,"<sup>23</sup> and that this capacity undergirds much (if not all) of the cooperative behavior demonstrated among prosocial species:

In grooming non-kin, an individual monkey might give a great deal more benefit than cost incurred, but it still incurs *some* cost: that half hour could profitably be used foraging for food or arranging sexual intercourse. So what possible advantage could there be in sacrificing *anything* for unrelated conspecifics? The obvious answer is that if those unrelated individuals would then groom *her* when she's finished grooming them, or at some later date, then that would be an all-round useful arrangement. If, then, all the monkeys entered into this cooperative venture, in total more benefit than costs would be distributed among them. (263)

Such a model suggests that reciprocal altruism, at least in certain cases, might provide a fitness benefit to both individual organisms as well as the entirety of their community.

In larger communities, however, more complex structures and mechanisms are needed to ensure that cooperation with the reciprocation process endures and that potential dissenters (i.e., free riders) are reduced or eliminated. To this end, Joyce suggests that additional metacognitive capacities, such as language and the establishment of reputation effects, evolved to enhance the effects of reciprocity (266). According to Joyce, these

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<sup>22</sup> Prinz (2007) lists the following examples: Cosmides and Tooby (1992), de Waal (1996), Haidt and Joseph (2004), Hauser (2006), Ruse (1991), Sober and Wilson (1998), and Turiel (2002).

<sup>23</sup> Joyce takes this term from Trivers (1971).

developments culminate in humans in the form of an innate capacity for moral judgment, a capacity that enhances the stability of the system of reciprocity undergirding social relationships among members of a community by ensuring that its members adhere to the established norms of said community. Being so rooted in evolutionary history, as a fitness-oriented adaptation, Joyce takes this to be sufficient to argue that the human capacity for moral judgment could plausibly be innate (257). I will return to this argument shortly.

The other main motivator for moral nativism is typically associated with the position that a native moral mechanism is seemingly needed to explain how humans are able to readily acquire moral rules and differentiate them from conventional ones. Susan Dwyer (2006, 2007, 2009) has repeatedly argued that a moral faculty must be innate, often employing an analogy to the Chomskyan nativist account of language acquisition. The claim that the nativist makes in the Chomskyan account is *not* that particular languages are hardwired into the human brain, but that there is a language acquisition mechanism that *is* innate in humans and that can explain how humans readily and rapidly acquire a primary language. Similarly, given the fact that humans, at least after a certain point in development, seem to readily acquire moral reasoning, and even distinguish moral rules from nonmoral rules with minimal prompting, it appears that there must be some innate capacity for moral judgment.

These sorts of nativist positions imply that what moral education should amount to is a matter of developing and deploying innate cognitive resources. What such programs would look like is unclear, but one thought might be that training native capacities should focus more on the learner's independent development, rather than within the context of a classroom. Drawing upon the Piagetian image of the "little scientist," for example, a



proponent of nativism might propose an exploratory program of education that allows the learner to discover for him- or herself the nature of morality (whatever that might be).<sup>24</sup> An analogy for such an approach might be found in the independent elements of Montessori-style education, which tend to emphasize the creativity and developmental potential of the individual learner. To this end, however, more traditional approaches to moral education might be construed as being ineffective, including social learning approaches, which emphasize the importance and necessity of social environments for the development of certain skills and abilities. This could mean that advocating and studying programs of such formats would not be conducive to moral development and may even be counterproductive.

## 2.2 The problems of nativism

Such an objection to social learning theories of moral development, and possibly other learning theories as well, is made too hastily. Although a full analysis of moral nativism is beyond the scope of this project, it is worthwhile to clarify the position of moral education with respect to moral nativism in contemporary philosophy of psychology. In particular, regardless of whether or not one is inclined to adopt a nativist position, traditional forms of moral education are still worthwhile topics of inquiry for both philosophy and cognitive sciences. To make this point salient, however, it will be helpful to evaluate the current state of literature on moral nativism in humans and explain how some lines of thought with regard to moral nativism are either problematic or simply need not conflict with social learning programs in moral education.

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<sup>24</sup> Interestingly, at least some prominent researchers in the cognitive scientists, such as Nucci and Turiel (2009), outright reject the nativist position while invoking Piaget in the explanation that the first few years of life are filled with social experiences that can influence one's development (152).

First, it will be helpful to clarify what contemporary moral nativists are claiming. Just as there has been disagreement regarding what constitutes innateness,<sup>25</sup> it is also unclear exactly what so-called “moral nativism” entails. In its strongest form, a nativist claim about morality might suggest that the capacities for reliable moral functioning are all preprogrammed in human beings and, over the course of a human’s maturation, gradually (or perhaps rapidly or immediately upon reaching a certain stage) activate. On this view, moral behavior does not require that anything additional be added to our psychology; we grow to have specific moral sensibilities rigged to be triggered by particular cues (e.g., seeing one’s family member being subjected to aggression) regardless of environmental and social factors such as upbringing and education.

This is *not* the position that contemporary moral nativists seem to take,<sup>26</sup> and with good reason. Empirically speaking, it would be very difficult to defend this position. First, one would want to provide evidence that the underlying mechanisms of morality (if not morals themselves) are present in human physiology from birth (or, at the very least, that the designs for such mechanisms and how they develop are present at birth). While there is support for the idea that particular regions of the brain are more active during what is presumably moral reasoning,<sup>27</sup> we lack concrete evidence to suggest that such activations are either prior to or independent of socialization. Additionally, the notion of what moral mechanisms are is vague: if the claim is that humans possess an innate comprehension of an abstract notion of morality, then one faces the difficulty of explaining cultural and

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<sup>25</sup> See, for example, Bateson (1991), Cowie (1999), Griffiths (2002), and Joyce (2006).

<sup>26</sup> Ancient thought is, of course, another story.

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Haidt (2001), and Haidt and Joseph (2004, 2008).

individual differences in what constitutes morality. If, on the other hand, the idea refers to capacities for developing dispositions and understandings that lend themselves to reliable moral behavior and an understanding of morality, then one must fill out this developmental story and explain how it is part of a distinctly nativist (as opposed to nonnativist) picture.

Taking the latter route, as nativists have done, leads one away from *strong* nativism.<sup>28</sup> Human development is quite messy: any of a number of external factors can influence how humans develop from infancy into adulthood on both physical and psychological levels. Even puberty, which might appear to be a good model for nativists of how certain phenotypic traits emerge with remarkable regularity at certain preset times in a human's life cycle, is highly dependent upon external factors that are not mere triggers for the process. Both the Association of Reproductive Health Professionals (2010) and the Society for Endocrinology (2014) have provided summaries of causes of both delayed and accelerated puberty in humans. Although it is acknowledged that some cases of delayed puberty are genetic, other cases can be due to myriad factors including chronic illness, malnutrition, excessive exercise, and psychological stress. The extent and nature of these effects has been further documented in Sharma et al. (2013) with a focus on how these factors contribute to infertility. Additionally, a variety of artificial chemicals (e.g., polychlorinated biphenyls and diethylstilbestrol) introduced into the environment are known to be deleterious to reproductive health. Given the complexity of interactions between human physical development and the environment, then, it should come as no surprise that moral development will also be largely affected by external factors. A *weaker* nativist position about morality might suggest the following: humans are born with certain

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<sup>28</sup> Dwyer (2007) implies that what I call the strong nativist view is a caricature of nativism.

capacities that, if permitted and encouraged to develop along their natural course, can and (typically) will lead to moral competence.

There are good empirical and theoretical reasons to be skeptical of at least some elements of weak nativism. Although we do find that there are typical developmental windows during which what we might think of as major moral milestones appear to occur, it is unclear that (a) these windows are inflexible periods and (b) that they occur regardless of social prompting. Kristin Lagattuta and Drika Weller (2014), for example, have pointed out that there is a transition period during which the so-called “conventional-moral” distinction is established. The development occurs over a series of years and a great deal of the behavior associated with particularly moral reasoning seems to occur in later childhood and early adolescence (390-1). This is interesting, since developmental windows, while occasionally broad, are not typically thought to be as broad as roughly a decade.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, other research has suggested that moral capability is heavily influenced by socialization. Malti and Ongley (2014), for example, repeatedly cite studies that demonstrate the importance of associating emotional responses with morally charged scenarios as a means of inculcating and improving reliability of moral performance (167-8). Although these studies do not conclusively show that morality is wholly learned, or even that such education is necessary, they do suggest that associative learning techniques are a part of moral development, and effective ones at that. Such techniques rely upon social learning elements associated with traditional moral education, demonstrating that

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<sup>29</sup> Of additional interest is the fact that what appears to be moral development, contrary to the typical expectations of nativist theorists, seems to go through periods of waxing and waning before adulthood. This would mean that moral development might not be a linear process but, rather, one that involves a series of cycles, valleys, and peaks. For more details, see Nucci and Turiel (2009).

such programs are useful to moral education. At the very least, it is clear that moral performance can certainly be enhanced by social learning. Thus, there is good evidence to support the idea that morality (or moral development) is heavily contingent upon social learning, rather than solely upon innate mechanisms (if at all).

This account also provides a parsimonious means of dealing with one of Joyce's worries about moral development, namely that there needs to be some explanation of how there comes to be something distinctly "moral" about reasoning (Joyce 2006, 273-4). Recall that Joyce is concerned about how to account for humans having an ability to engage in moral reasoning as opposed to "mere" practical reasoning. The implication is that there are distinctive features of reasoning in a moral context, namely that the constraints imposed by moral reasoning seem to be substantially stronger than those from prudential reasoning. In the moral cases, sufficiently developed humans have senses of moral prohibition that compel them to behave in accordance with the rules of morality; such sensibilities are not usually present for prudential reasoning. As such, there are certain affective features of moral reasoning that might be explained by distinct mechanisms for moral reasoning. The aforementioned findings, however, suggest a relatively simple alternative process for moralizing one's reasoning: conditioning. By learning to associate certain feelings with particular scenarios, one can be conditioned to respond in particular ways, including in terms of how one thinks/feels about the situation. It is plausible that this association between feeling and scenario, and how it is utilized in one's reasoning process, could be the key to giving reasoning its particularly moral flavor in the relevant situations, without the need to posit a mechanism for moral reasoning that is wholly distinct from general

practical reasoning. Social learning can explain how moral reasoning develops,<sup>30</sup> then, and there is no immediate need to posit additional mechanisms or systemic complexity.

A bit more must be said on this topic before proceeding. In his account, Joyce never explicitly claims that moral sensibilities are (strictly) affective in nature; on the contrary, they might be conceptual. If this is so, and if Joyce's depiction of moral reasoning is accurate, then he may yet have some recourse: even if conditioning can inculcate the association of certain concepts with certain scenarios, it does not follow that these concepts will be motivationally compelling. If, however, there is a moral mechanism to ensure that such concepts motivate, then such a mechanism would indeed undergird moral reasoning.

This still unnecessarily complicates the picture. Joyce seems to assume that human moral sensibilities at least have an affective component; that is, the way that they compel people is by making them *feel* and *value* (i.e., desire) the moral concepts to which they are tied (Joyce 2006, 274-5). Although the capacity (or capacities) for emotion and valuation may well be innate, it is not obvious that their specifics are preprogrammed. It may be the case that one only comes to associate certain feelings and values with particular scenarios and principles upon encountering them and coming to understand their ramifications (e.g., learning to associate guilt with harming another person).

This brings us to the second point: it is not obvious how these moral sensibilities are distinct from feelings of sympathy and guilt. While it is unclear that Joyce believes

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<sup>30</sup> Susan Dwyer (2007) has objected that social learning is incapable of accounting for how processes of conditioning, via imitation and internalization, take place and, therefore, are at least no better off than nativist theories on this account. It is unclear to me what Dwyer's targets are here. If the challenge is directed at the fact that we cannot cite the exact physical parts of the brain responsible for imitative learning, then the challenge could well be directed at a large number of metacognitive processes, not just learning. If the challenge is directed at imitative learning as a model in itself, then it needs to explain away decades of seemingly adequate theorizing regarding animal behavior.

these sorts of sensibilities to be distinct, or that he can distinguish them, he needs them to be for a strong argument. If moral sensibilities are simply feelings such as guilt, shame, and sympathy, then we can still appeal to the program of affective association depicted above without positing additional mechanisms. For Joyce to preserve his thesis, moral sensibilities *need* to be in some sense distinct. The problem is that Joyce must provide an argument for why these sensibilities are distinct and how they might be more efficacious than the aforementioned sensibilities that are traditionally associated with moral reasoning and action. Joyce provides no such argument, and it is not clear that he can.

One thought might be that feelings such as guilt and sympathy are already conceptually contentful. If these feelings precede social learning, then there is good reason to assume that they are innate. The problem here is that there is a lack of empirical evidence to support the idea that these feelings, at least in any contentful sense, are innate. At least some theorists suggest that guilt is not innate, but is learned by associating fear of punishment with certain actions (e.g., Turner and Stets 2005, 19). Sympathy and empathy are a different matter: a number of theorists suggest that these capacities are, at least to some degree, innate (e.g., McDonald and Messinger 2011; Zahn-Waxler et al. 1979; Zahn-Waxler et al. 1992a; Zahn-Waxler et al. 1992b). The problem, however, is that mere empathy/sympathy alone is not enough to produce reliable moral behavior, especially since they may not themselves be reliably deployed across relevant situations. This means that these capacities must be trained to make them reliable both on their own terms and also in the service of morality; social learning is one viable method of producing this outcome. What this means, however, is that what we have at best are innate *protomoral* dispositions rather than moral ones, and that social learning *is* integral to moral development.

The latter concern (i.e., morality's dependence upon social prompting) might be preempted by Joyce's argument. Joyce suggests that morality might be "the output of an innate conditional strategy, in which case even . . . societies with nothing recognizable as a moral system would not be inconsistent with morality's being part of human nature, for such societies may not satisfy the antecedent of the conditional" (258). The appeal to human nature here is vague. For the sake of being charitable, I will assume that it refers to a collection of species-typical, innate traits. It is unclear precisely *how* one can provide evidence or argument for the claim that the coordination strategy of morality is innate. Moral reasoning, on most theories,<sup>31</sup> encompasses subconscious and affective capacities along with a number of complex metacognitive skills, including the ability to recognize and react appropriately to certain moral systems of principles, rules, and/or cues. Such systems, however, require social input; that is to say, for a person to develop a contentful sense of morality, and barring the existence of innate moral knowledge, he or she must be presented with social experiences that do not merely trigger, but substantially shape (i.e., give both content and form to) said moral sense. Without such input, it seems that humans are left exclusively with (at most) innate prosocial emotions.

On this note, it is unclear whether the so-called "moral" faculty, if it exists, is concerned with anything that would be recognized as morality. More often than not, the arguments made by nativist theorists suggest that there may be some innate *prosocial* faculties, such as empathy or a capacity for reciprocation, but this is no guarantee of *promoral* faculties. Joyce himself seems to concede this point, but suggests that there is

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<sup>31</sup> Naturally, exceptions (e.g., emotivism) might arise. This, however, is one metaethical theory among many, and is not shared by all human beings, nor do nativists as a whole seem to defend it.



something distinctive about the nature of human moral judgments that is either built into or upon these prosocial faculties (261-3). Joyce's argument here is somewhat vague: in his attempts to characterize a distinctive character of *moral* judgment, he lists a number of potential features of such judgments, but he does not argue about what features are necessary to define moral judgment.<sup>32</sup> It might be that the faculty being defended does contribute to moral judgment and reasoning, but is not in itself moral. Rather, it may simply provide a foundation for moral development. Indeed, the language of some theorists regarding the psychology of morality, such as Jonathan Haidt and Craig Joseph (2008), explicitly refers to such capacities as “psychological primitives” and “building blocks” for morality, rather than as moral faculties in themselves (381). If even cognitive scientists are hesitant to ascribe morality to faculties they are otherwise willing to defend as innate, then it should probably give philosophers pause to reconsider this labeling as well.

Having said this, it might be objected that philosophers, traditionally having domain over the topic of morality, are more qualified than cognitive scientists to remark upon what counts as morality. As such, philosophers might not be made wary by the cognitive scientists' hesitation on this topic. Two things can be said about this. First, the objection assumes that the philosophers are well-informed and the cognitive scientists are ill-informed with regard to the history of theorizing about what morality is. This may be a fair assumption, but it also may very well not be, in which case the cognitive scientists *would* have a point. Second, the issue of expertise does cut both ways: while philosophers might (typically) be better positioned to know about what constitutes morality

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<sup>32</sup> In fact, many of the features, such as attitude of expression, inescapability, and emotionality, might (at least on some theories) be coopted by other types of judgment, such as aesthetic judgment.

conceptually, cognitive scientists are likely better positioned to talk about the nature and limits of human cognitive architecture, especially with regard to what parts of the brain can and cannot do and how they can and cannot interact. At the very least, then philosophers should be open to considering the labeling concerns held by cognitive scientists.

Now, let us consider the idea of faculty nativism presented explicitly by Dwyer. According to Dwyer (2007), moral faculty nativism refers strictly to the thesis that there exists some innate mechanism (or collection of mechanisms) that, over the course of development, can be utilized as the foundation for moral reasoning/judgment. This faculty/capacity/mechanism is merely a baseline for morality in the sense that it enables one to develop a morality and think morally (whatever that might end up meaning).<sup>33</sup> Even if humans have such a faculty, the *content* of one's morality still needs to be filled in. This is because the faculty only goes so far as to provide humans with a means of acquiring morality, much like the proposed language faculty provides humans with a means of acquiring languages (411-2). This means that the content must be learned, and the only plausible resource from which one can learn moral content, also as with language, is one's social environment. As such, even on a (plausible) nativist account of human morality, moral education, as a matter of learning from certain external resources, is still necessary if one wants to ensure that developing humans acquire a contentful moral sensibility.

Regardless of whether or not one is compelled by the nativist position, it should become immediately apparent that, based on these presentations of moral nativism alongside findings in developmental literature, nativists and empiricists can (and should) agree on the role, nature, and viability of more traditional, socially based approaches to

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<sup>33</sup> I leave it to the nativists to argue whether this faculty *inclines* one toward promoral dispositions.

moral education. I am willing to concede that there may be innate tendencies in humans to develop certain patterns of reasoning, and even tendencies to develop capacities for prosocial dispositions such as reciprocity and empathy. Even assuming the nativist depiction of moral development to be accurate, however, it appears that what humans receive from their native endowments amounts to little more than capacities for prosocial, and in turn promoral, dispositions rather than full-blown morality itself. Indeed, humans might even typically be inclined toward prosocial displays,<sup>34</sup> but this does not demonstrate that humans have an innate sense of full-blown morality. At best, it shows that humans might have a collection of building blocks that, when appropriately assembled, promote moral behavior, and this is not at all the same thing as having an innate moral sense.<sup>35</sup>

An investment by philosophy can also produce a critical analysis of current moral education programs, particularly their methods and underlying theories, and may help to better conceptualize and deploy these programs. Modern research on moral education and development can also be used to better inform philosophical ideas on these topics. Toward such ends, I now examine one contemporary social learning theory that might help to provide a theoretical underpinning for moral education, namely that of Lev Vygotsky.

### 2.3 Vygotsky alongside theory of learning in current philosophy

As is apparent from the abundance of nativist theories, contemporary philosophy of science has become increasingly invested in the phenomena of learning and

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<sup>34</sup> See for example, Hamlin, Wynn, and Bloom (2007, 557-560).

<sup>35</sup> An alternative view, for which I thank Eric Hutton, would be to grant the weak nativist the existence of some innate, coarse grain moral capacities while maintaining this idea that said dispositions cannot on their own provide everything that philosophers typically expect of a moral sense. Depending upon how one would want to flesh out these capacities, I might also be amenable to such a position.

development. Nativism, however, does not hold a monopoly on philosophical thought: there are also models that fall more in line with social learning, with Kim Sterelny's (2012) "apprentice learning theory" being the most recent and nuanced account of psychosocial development. While Sterelny is primarily interested in giving an account of development that diverges from the nativist accounts popular among certain research programs in evolved human behaviors and general psychology,<sup>36</sup> he does so in part by offering an account of how much psychosocial development can be accounted for in terms of what he describes as social learning. Sterelny depicts social learning as a hybridization of explicit learning (e.g., receiving instruction by more knowledgeable persons, following exemplars, etc.), practice (e.g., attempting to deploy skills and refining said deployment), and imitative learning. All of this takes place within an environment that is "seeded with informational resources," including not only informative instructors, but also perceptible patterns that can be comprehended and (to varying degrees) manipulated (35). The notion of learning through doing while also receiving guidance from more experienced members of the community explains the apprentice-like nature of learning and cognitive development.

This also provides Sterelny with a means of avoiding full-on nativism: when the social and physical environments are sufficiently stable, humans are able to develop and maintain particular skills and practices, including culture. Culture itself then becomes part of the feedback loop, being integrated into the environment itself and serving to reinforce certain norms over time, including moral norms. While Sterelny does point out that it is likely that humans are predisposed toward certain prosocial emotions, and that these

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<sup>36</sup> Chief among such programs is evolutionary psychology. For an overview, see Tooby and Cosmides (2005).

emotions likely play an important role in the socialization of norms, this does not entail that moral development in any thick sense is innate: these predispositions might be very crude, general, and basic; moral precepts are typically much more sophisticated and would require social learning (165). Thus, learning across all fields, including social norms, is explicable in terms of apprenticeship.

Sterelny's general view falls in line with many social learning theories currently under research in the cognitive sciences, but a drawback that Sterelny's view faces from an empirical perspective is its novelty: having only recently been introduced, it is difficult to claim direct empirical support for the account. Fortunately, Sterelny's apprentice learning theory aligns in many respects with a learning theory that has received substantial attention in education and cognitive science over the past several decades, particularly that of Lev Vygotsky.<sup>37</sup> Vygotsky, like Sterelny, emphasizes the role of the social in cognitive development and is skeptical of full-on nativism: humans may have certain developmental predispositions, but these predispositions are relatively thin in terms of what content they provide for humans. In contrast to a learning theory such as that of Jean Piaget, a contemporary of Vygotsky's, *social* interaction provides the foundation for more sophisticated cognitive developments. Piaget, in contrast, leans in a slightly more nativist direction,<sup>38</sup> suggesting that, while development is a partially product of exploring one's

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<sup>37</sup> Interestingly, one of Sterelny's influences is Michael Tomasello, much of whose research is influenced by the very theory that Vygotsky originates. See Tomasello, Kruger, and Ratner (1993). Barbara Wimsatt (2010) also places Sterelny among theorists who have adopted such theories of learning (344).

<sup>38</sup> I hesitate to align Piaget completely with nativism, since his work leaves open the possibility that the innate predispositions of development he discusses can be highly susceptible to social influences in precisely the manner Vygotsky employs in his theory. Prinz (2007) makes a similar point in his critique of moral nativism's attempts to draw upon Piaget as a resource. It may ultimately be the case that Piagetian and Vygotskian theories are complements rather than rivals, at least when it comes to big picture issues.

environment, it also depends upon the maturation of innate mechanisms that (roughly) correspond to certain stages of development. If Piaget's position can be construed as suggesting that the development of competencies is contingent primarily upon biology/psychology, then Vygotsky's can be summarized as suggesting that such development is contingent primarily upon socialization.

It is worthwhile to further detail the distinctness of Vygotsky's view as a form of educational constructivism. Vygotsky's constructivism, often referred to as sociocultural or sociohistorical constructivism, is distinct from other such views due to its focus on the deep role that cultural influences play on an individual's development. While both Piaget and Vygotsky accept that instruction is necessary to facilitate development, and that social factors will therefore affect learning, they make radically different assumptions regarding the extent to which such external factors will impact development. As mentioned, the Piagetian program tends toward a nativist line, emphasizing stages of development and an innate power for reasoning possessed by the individual. Vygotsky, however, is skeptical of innate abilities (at least to the extent that Piaget grants to some of them), and suggests that much of the capacity to learn is itself predicated upon social experiences: features such as the culture and language in which one is brought up actually *build and shape* these capacities. This is because one's social setting is filled with a number of cultural tools and artifacts (such as language) that will serve as the media by which new information and experiences are introduced (and ultimately internalized and understood) by a learner. The important distinction, compared with a view such as Piaget's, is that the cultural contents (i.e., the social tools) are not merely providing educational *content*, but functionally restructuring thought as a whole – that is the sense in which knowledge is *constructed* for

Vygotsky. An upshot of this position is that, given the diversity of cultural tools (such as language, customs, and dogmas) that humans employ, we should expect humans to differ as learners not only on individual levels, but also on communal levels as well.

This is a noteworthy feature of the Vygotskian account: it emphasizes the importance of cultural diversity and, in so doing, provides Vygotskian views with a practical component absent from nativist and Piagetian lines of theorizing, namely the role that social interaction and cultural artifacts play in cognitive development. As noted by Nicola Yelland and Jennifer Masters (2007), these foci provide Vygotskian models of learning and development with an advantage over Piagetian approaches in particular:

The influence of Vygotskian theory on educational practice has been one the most striking features of the past decade. Although a constructivist approach, grounded in the work of Piaget, had previously dominated pedagogy in schools, its lack of consideration of group learning processes, the social contexts of learning and the influences of cultural diversity, together with problems associated with the invariant notion of stages of development that are universal, has led to its demise as the primary means for explaining and providing contexts for learning and development. (363, modified)

While Piaget's work focuses primarily upon the development of an individual interacting with the physical world, Vygotsky focuses upon the individual as being largely a *product* of the *social* world, with the identity (i.e., personality) emerging along with various socially facilitated competencies. As a result, Vygotsky also places features such as group learning, cultural diversity, and learning context toward the center of his theory. While not averse to the notions of developmental stages that are (largely) predetermined by innate propensities of the brain to develop in certain ways, Vygotsky emphasizes that such development is facilitated by interaction with one's world, and that social interaction in particular effects development in ways that not only help to advance learners but also differentiate them.

This is particularly important for theorizing about group learning contexts, in which not only is instruction “shared” by multiple different learners, but the learners themselves may then interact and reconstruct information in a variety of ways (ideally with those most competent guiding their less competent peers). These elements of Vygotsky’s theory alone have made it invaluable for research into learning within and across communities, as well as developing effective instructional techniques for diverse learner groups.

While the breadth of writing on Vygotsky and how he might be applied in the instruction of many topics is encouraging, little has been written with regard to how the specific endeavor of *moral* education might proceed. In what remains of the chapter, I consider one account (Tappan 1997) by which Vygotsky might provide for explaining moral development. It draws upon Vygotsky’s general notion of artifact- and peer-mediated learning. I then critically evaluate the account and raise several problems for the Vygotskian approach. The chapter closes with a prospective consideration of how these problems might be addressed, turning to current research in socialization theory and suggesting alternative sociocultural artifacts that can supplement moral education.

## 2.4 The Vygotskian account and its viability as a theory of learning

One of the distinctive features of Vygotsky’s program is its emphasis on the role and influence of the social world for cognitive development. Briefly, the Vygotskian developmental model emphasizes that cognitive development is predominantly social rather than individualistic or isolated (i.e., the rapidity and depth of development is heavily contingent upon interactions with others). For Vygotsky, development of higher order psychological processes entails a sort of skill mastery, in which “an operation that initially represents an external activity is reconstructed and begins to occur internally” (Vygotsky



1978, 56-7). This means that development is necessarily mediated by the acquisition and utilization of social artifacts/tools. The most important tool for Vygotsky is language: since verbal language is the primary means of communication between human beings, it is also the primary developmental tool for transmitting information from adults to children. Upon internalizing and appropriating language, it fundamentally transforms thought:

[The] nature of the development itself changes from biological to sociohistorical. Verbal thought is not an innate, natural form of behavior, but is determined by a historical-cultural process and has specific properties and laws that cannot be found in the natural forms of thought and speech. (Tappan 1997, 94-5)

Upon acquiring and utilizing verbal language, language becomes the manner in which thought is organized. On an intrapersonal level, this amounts to what Vygotsky referred to as “inner speech” or “egocentric speech” which, in the beginning, is

identical in structure with social speech, but in the process of [social speech’s] transformation into inner speech, it gradually becomes less complete and coherent as it becomes governed by an almost entirely predicative syntax . . . The child talks about the things he sees or hears or does at a given moment. As a result, he tends to leave out the subject and all words connected with it, condensing his speech more and more until only predicates are left. The more differentiated the specific function of egocentric speech becomes, the more pronounced are its syntactic peculiarities — simplification and predication. (Vygotsky 1986, 243-4)

Inner speech provides a shorthand for organizing thought (so short, in fact, that its users tend toward agglutination of terms). On an interpersonal level, language enables communication between people, which allows for exchanges of information.

An additional facet of Vygotsky’s account brings the influence of social artifacts into interaction with social interactions themselves. Specifically, Vygotsky explains the social nature of cognitive development by appealing to two concepts: the more

knowledgeable other ("MKO") and the zone of proximal development ("ZPD").<sup>39</sup> MKOs are any individuals who, relative to a learner, are better-versed in a particular skillset.<sup>40</sup> This can be an ability as specific as aeronautic engineering or as general as basic mathematical reasoning. As such, one might think of MKOs as being treated as exemplars of skill competence and, in turn, providing templates upon which the learner may base his or her behavior.<sup>41</sup> The ZPD is, "the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky 1978, 86). By appealing to MKOs, learners are able to develop from their baseline ZPDs via a process of internalizing skills and capacities.

Learning begins with exposure to and assistance from MKOs, wherein basic skills and capacities are first introduced to the learner. Assuming that the skills are within the learner's ZPD,<sup>42</sup> the learner may then engage in performance him- or herself. What follows is a process of internalization and refinement (also known as "scaffolding") as the learner proceeds to integrate the skills in a manner that allows for successful performance. It is noteworthy that this process involves trial-and-error, and learners may return to MKOs for assistance in further refining a particular skill, collaborating with them as a means of further

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<sup>39</sup> Vygotsky (1978) never uses the expression "more knowledgeable other," instead referring to "more competent peers" among potential guides (e.g., teachers, parents, etc.) for cognitive development (86).

<sup>40</sup> Technically, many resources could serve as MKOs, such as instructional manuals or websites. It is only for the sake of brevity that this paper focuses upon human-human interactions.

<sup>41</sup> Yaroshevsky (1989) explains, "the individual constructs the idea of his own person in the likeness of another individual, receiving his speech reflexes, and thus 'settling' the other in his own organism" (87).

<sup>42</sup> This is an important point: If a skill/capacity is far beyond a learner's ZPD, then he or she may simply fail to acquire it. For example, a child who has not yet developed competence in fundamental arithmetic will likely be incapable of developing a rudimentary understanding of the Riemann hypothesis.

development. This means that the learning process is interactive, and that both learner and teacher are active participants in the development of new knowledge.

It is also important to note that this phase does not necessarily mark the end of development; it may be repeated *ad infinitum* as a learner continues to refine his or her skills, making learning a lifelong process. In the process, however, successful learners continue to develop their understanding and, as a result, gradually shift their ZPDs, making increasingly complex and more difficult skills accessible.<sup>43</sup> As a result, we see development from a crude, rudimentary grasp of a particular skill or piece of knowledge to a refined, complex understanding of said skill or knowledge over the progression of the interactions between learners and MKOs.

Vygotsky's account of learning has found support in current empirical research, with the developmental model receiving support from the work of Wertsch (1985), Wood and Wood (1996), Tappan (1997, 1998), and Garzotto (2007). Garzotto in particular provides empirical support for Vygotsky's theory regarding the social nature of learning, especially the effects of collaboration. Garzotto evaluates two hypotheses:

- i) social interaction in online edutainment promotes children's learning; in particular, playing an online educational game *together* is *more effective for learning* than playing *alone*;
  - ii) *different conditions of social interaction* induce different learning effects.
- (382)

Garzotto also evaluates learning on both the cognitive (i.e., intellectual skills) and affective (i.e., coping with emotions) levels (382). Garzotto examines interactions of eight- and nine-year-olds in the context of a single or multiplayer "edutainment" game, with the

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<sup>43</sup> This is not to suggest that a ZPD is eliminated. Rather, one must think of the learner's overall ability as expanding, while some ZPD remains extant, representing both remaining unattained potential development, as well as newly unlocked potential development that comes with increasing skill.

multiplayer variant being divided into a cooperative version and a hybrid cooperative-competitive version. While participants across the board tended to develop the skills taught by the game, and rate the experience favorably, Garzotto reports that those in the interactive multiplayer settings demonstrated better performance during the segments of the game that tested skill development (384), and also had more positive emotional reactions to the process of learning new skills (385). This suggests that both cognitive and affective learning methods benefit from permitting and encouraging peer collaboration, much in line with Vygotsky's prediction regarding the role of the MKO and peer-enhanced learning.

Perhaps some of the most striking support for the Vygotskian peer- and artifact-mediated model of learning can be derived from findings regarding the apparent development of skill competence. First observed by John R. Anderson, Jon M. Fincham, and Scott Douglass (1997), the four components of skill learning are as follow:

(a) *analogy to examples*: retrieval of the study example and analogical extension of the example to the current problem, (b) *declarative abstractions*: after a few applications participants probably consciously identify the rule associated with the sport and apply it, (c) *production rules*: with extensive practice participants develop a procedural embodiment of the rule, and (d) *retrieval of examples*: retrieval of an example that matches the target problem and simple readout of the answer. (938)

The process is both cyclical and compounding. Learners first take worked examples of problems relevant to the target skill (d) for the purpose of recognition, and then analogize to the problem with which they are currently presented (a). After repeating this process, learners conceptualize general rules derived from the analogical connections between problems (this is also where inductive and deductive reasoning more strongly come into play). Ultimately, learners develop production rules (i.e., implicit, nonpropositional knowledge) for solving problems and rely less upon the reportable, abstract rules.

An upshot of these findings is that learning occurs in phases that may require very different forms of instruction and, further, that instructional methods may need to adapt rapidly to the needs of learners. Renkl et al. (2002) follows Anderson, Fincham, and Douglass in criticizing current instructional methods for lacking emphasis on what they describe as the “fading” procedure for improving learner skill. “Fading” refers to a gradual shift from explicit, direct guidance to minimal guidance in instruction. In their experiments, Renkl et al. employed a fading procedure by starting learners with completely worked examples (e.g., the physics of voltage) and gradually shifting them toward nondirected problem solving. By integrating example study and problem solving along a sliding scale over time, learners exhibited improved performance on the relevant tasks compared to learners who received either example study or problem solving instruction exclusively or were transitioned at a more jarring rate. The findings suggest that in order to optimize the efficacy of instructional methods, they must provide learners with a means of smoothly transitioning from a novice state to a position of competence.

Also worth emphasizing is the finding by Anderson, Fincham, and Douglass (1997) that the phases are not necessarily exclusive: at any point during skill development, a learner may be observed employing a combination of any of the learning components (945). This is consistent with Vygotsky’s account regarding the ZPD and skill maturation, particularly the idea that learning is a constant, recurring, and collaborative process that may sometimes require backtracking.

## 2.5 Moral development: an unfinished account

Given its apparent viability for education in general, Vygotsky’s theory of learning might appear to be an ideal candidate for providing a basis for a theory of moral education

in particular. Despite a lifetime of prolific writing, however, Vygotsky passed away before completing an account of moral development. Although Vygotsky covers a number of related topics, namely the generation and maintenance of complex skills, emotional development, and personality, he never explicitly connects any of these to an account of moral development. While researchers have built upon the groundwork Vygotsky laid in many of these areas, attempts to expand upon moral development have been relatively few.<sup>44</sup> Currently, only one account explicitly attempts to complete Vygotsky's unfinished work in this regard: Mark Tappan (1997) suggests that a Vygotskian account of moral development can be formulated based upon Vygotsky's account of how development proceeds in terms of skill mastery of social artifacts/tools.<sup>45</sup> Specifically, given the centrality of language to psychosocial development in Vygotsky's account, Tappan suggests that moral development is contingent upon sociolinguistic development:

- 1) moral functioning (like all "higher psychological functioning") is necessarily mediated by words, language, and forms of discourse;
- 2) such mediation occurs primarily in private or inner speech, typically in the form of inner moral dialogue;
- 3) because language is the social medium par excellence, processes of social communication and social relations necessarily give rise to moral functioning;
- 4) because words, language, and forms of discourse are inherently sociocultural phenomena, moral development is always shaped by the particular social, cultural, and historical context in which it occurs. (87)

Tappan's interpretation takes the basic Vygotskian account of artifact-mediated development and applies it to moral development. It suggests that language plays the same role in developing moral thought and behavior as it plays in other realms of skill generation.

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<sup>44</sup> Moral development is often researched alongside character development and socialization. I will discuss socialization shortly. Character development is detailed in Killen and Smetana (2014).

<sup>45</sup> See also Tappan (1998a, 1998b, 2006); for examples of expansions upon Tappan, see Fernyhough (2008) and Balakrishnan and Claiborne (2012).

This is at least roughly plausible given the social nature of morality (i.e., moral rules derive their force at least partially from the fact that one lives in a world in relation to others), especially since some sociomoral traditions are heavily influenced by, if not products of or the bases for, particular cultures.<sup>46</sup> This is especially true of the “inner speech” that might be thought of as providing an agent with an “inner moral voice.” As such, one’s linguistic competence and the particular language culture into which a person is assimilated should be expected to feature in an individual’s moral development, since much moral reasoning will necessarily be mediated and facilitated by verbal expression.

Tappan also claims that his adaptation of Vygotsky can account for the affective and motivational components of moral behavior. In support of this claim, he cites one of Vygotsky’s (1986) quotes on motivation:

Thought is not the superior authority in this process. Thought is not begotten by thought; it is engendered by motivation, i.e., by our desires and needs, our interests and emotions. Behind every thought there is an affective-volitional tendency, which holds the answer to the last “why” in the analysis of thinking. A true and full understanding of another’s thought is possible only when we understand its affective-volitional basis. (252)

Although it is clear from this excerpt that Vygotsky himself has little determinate to say on the topic of motivated behavior, Tappan construes Vygotsky’s statement as a suggestion that moral behavior, insofar as it is motivated behavior, must be construed as having at least *some* affective component. Tappan’s language-based account of moral development, then, will also need to tap into the learner’s affective states, presumably associating them

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<sup>46</sup> I emphasize the use of the term “particular” here. I am not presupposing either ethical relativism or absolutism; rather, I am suggesting that one’s *individual* moral thought and behavior is often highly influenced by one’s culture. Morally salient features of situations require an agent to perceive them to act accordingly, but what and whether something is perceived is contingent upon one’s enculturated capacity. This claim is applicable even in an ethical absolutist framework, since one might argue for the existence of a set of universally applicable rules while acknowledging that different communities might have different thresholds and styles of observing said rules.

with the moral concepts that the learner constructs over the course of moral development.

This framework is also attractive from a more general educational and developmental perspective. The suggestion that moral competence must be gradually acquired in a manner akin to mastery of other skillsets implies that development is learner-centric and socially enhanced. It is learner-centric in the sense that the learner is actively engaged in the process of constructing his or her moral comprehension by means of scaffolding upon an information base that is constantly growing in breadth and depth (e.g., personal experiences, association of behavior and affect, etc.). It is socially enhanced given that an individual's moral development will be partially contingent upon his or her interactions with the environment, particularly other human beings such as parents, peers, and authority figures, and how these relationships guide individuals toward particular moral outlooks (e.g., parental admonishment and encouragement, paradigmatic stories, etc.). It is also important to emphasize that, due to the large role that social interactions will play in the development of moral competence, the information taken in by the learner need not be passively received and adopted: as with language, it is anticipated that the individual learner will struggle and reformulate information as his or her thought becomes increasingly organized. This fits with the position that the learner's representations of moral ideals will be contextualized and, moreover, subjective to the extent that said representation will be his or her own, which is another core assumption of Vygotsky's.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Again, subjectivity need not be construed as calling for radical relativity. As previously noted, one's moral views will be influenced by the context in which they were developed; we should anticipate learners that share a culture will develop very similar moral outlooks given their shared educational environment. It is also obvious that individuals can share their moral perspectives via discourse, so subjectivity extends only to the sense in which an individual's concepts are necessarily one's own.



## 2.6 Problems for moral development in the Vygotskian model

Tappan's elaboration is in many ways faithful to Vygotsky's vision of development, but it does run into several problems as a result. First, Tappan's account of how affect and motivation build into (or onto) the language-mediated account of moral development is hazy at best: What explains the manner in which social artifacts are able to elicit and connect certain affective responses with particular behaviors and ideals? Tappan might appeal to Vygotsky's notion of the personality as a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts, with the relationship between affect and moral concepts being a byproduct of the manner in which these components are incorporated into an individual's worldview. It is still unclear *how* moral language and affect become associated on this view, but it may strike some as acceptable.

Even with such charitable views, though, it is still unclear how language alone is sufficient to provide scaffolding for an individual to develop moral competence. Moral competence, after all, requires that an individual be capable of reliably comprehending and following moral prescriptions; it entails that an individual understands what he or she *should* do, a capacity that does not necessarily accompany linguistic competence.<sup>48</sup> For example, a person might be exceedingly linguistically competent but fail to display any compunction upon committing an immoral act; indeed, such a person might even utilize his or her linguistic competency to engage in immoral acts (e.g., telling malicious lies).<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Moral competence could also entail being properly motivated to do what one should do.

<sup>49</sup> An argument might be made that such capacities *are* required for certain language skills, such as the ability to write effective poetry and fiction. In response, I suggest that such skills actually require talents beyond mere language mastery. The development of an effective story, for example, requires an author to be capable of producing a text that can draw and hold a reader's attention. Part of this ability comes from linguistic competence, but it is also partly a matter of understanding what sorts of stories might garner a reader's interest and how to manipulate words based on *this* competency for the sake of developing an

We can further highlight the schism between linguistic competence and moral competence by examining what each seems to entail. Although both natural language and morality constrain and prescribe certain kinds of behavior, they do so to different degrees (i.e., there is a greater degree of openness and flexibility for general linguistic productions than for moral productions) and require significantly different developmental inputs (i.e., the social experiences required for a learner to cultivate competence in a particular skill or set of skills). Specifically, whereas language acquisition and competence certainly require exposure and socialization for a learner to completely develop his or her linguistic skill, especially regarding idiomatic expressions, natural language is also comparatively open-ended in that even competent speakers are capable of generating an infinite number of potentially appropriate responses in any given course of conversation.

In contrast, moral competence requires practitioners to develop a wide array of capacities that may necessitate significant constraints on behavior, such as awareness of the mental states of others and empathy/sympathy, in order to inform proper moral judgment and action; this requirement is arguably nonexistent for the cultivation of linguistic competence (and, again, it is possible for a person to be a competent language user while being an immoral villain). This argument is furthered by the fact that the proper use of language does not *require* practitioners to engage their own or others' emotions when socially interacting.<sup>50</sup> One can navigate a conversation without any particular

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effective text. The implication is that language skills alone are insufficient to produce these more advanced products and effects.

<sup>50</sup> There are, of course, certain situations in which expressions will be affectively laden. For example, the expression "yuck" indicates disgust, so an effective exchange might require one to recognize that an interlocutor's use of "yuck" indicates his or her disgust. This is not, however, common to all language, and one may also employ a term like "yuck" without necessarily being disgusted oneself. We can contrast

emotional change or consideration. In morally charged scenarios, however, emotions necessarily play a role. This means that the aforementioned capacities of empathy/sympathy *must* be cultivated as part of the moral development process but, as previously noted, it is unclear on Tappan's account just *how* such capacities can be cultivated via linguistic mediation alone (or even primarily).

Let us consider how one might go about developing tests for both linguistic and moral competence. In the case of the former, the tests will need to discern a person's ability to understand and generate spoken and (if applicable) nonspoken expressions of a given language. This means that tests will be across four dimensions: understanding spoken communications, generating spoken communications, understanding nonspoken communications, and generating nonspoken communications. One's linguistic competency is based upon how well one performs according to these four dimensions.

Testing for moral competence, on the other hand, has a different focus. Being moral, on the account that I am developing and in the sense that is seemingly relevant for developmental psychologists, is about acting in general and not simply about processing propositions. Rather than merely considering a person's ability to understand and produce morally relevant linguistic expressions (e.g., given the scenario of seeing a baby approaching an open well, the subject responds that the proper course of action is to save the baby), tests of moral competence will be concerned with eliciting the appropriate moral actions from the person (e.g., upon seeing the baby crawling toward the open well, the subject actually rushes forward and protects the baby). Indeed, it is arguable that at least

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this with cases of moral action, in which certain behaviors should be understood as expressing a particular feeling or warranting a particular response.

some such test designs might include no (overtly) linguistic component whatsoever (what, after all, is the *linguistic* prompt to save the baby?), which further suggests a discrepancy between the two forms of competence.

An important implication of this distinction is that the account of moral development given by Tappan on behalf of Vygotsky is (at least) incomplete: linguistic competence cannot be the *whole* of moral development, so Tappan's account is insufficient to completely explain moral development. This insufficiency can be further fleshed out upon consideration of point (3) in Tappan's account of moral development (i.e., that language "necessarily" gives rise to moral development). What Tappan intends with this assertion is unclear. If the claim is strictly that moral perfection is in some way bound up with linguistic ability, and that one will need language skills to become morally competent, then there is some feasibility to Tappan's account. Moral development does appear to be a special form of psychosocial development, and language is certainly important for this process. This account will still be *incomplete* for the aforementioned reasons, but it is not implausible that language might play some role here.

It *is* implausible if Tappan intends "necessarily" to mean either that language is both necessary *and* sufficient for moral development or that language competence must necessarily precede other competencies that might play into moral development. The first option suggests that moral competence is predicated upon linguistic competence; given the significant role that emotions play in moral thought and action, it is unlikely that this is the case.<sup>51</sup> The second option is also problematic: the appearance of promoral emotions seems to precede language use. Since these emotions also play into moral competence, it seems

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<sup>51</sup> Tappan may not intend this, since language's organizational role might accommodate emotions.

unlikely that language is a *precursor* to moral development. What might be said instead is that language competence is important for moral development, but not the whole of it. Such a conclusion should not be surprising given Tappan's own statements regarding the affective, possibly noncognitive and/or irrational components of motivated behavior (of which moral behavior is presumably one sort). It does, however, reinforce the concern that Tappan's extension of Vygotsky reveals either that the Vygotskian model of learning is incapable of explaining moral development, or (and more likely) that the account presently on offer has not yet been sufficiently refined such that it can fully explain moral development and, in turn, provide a basis for a theory of moral learning and education.

## 2.7 Prospective resolutions to the theoretical gap

Despite the shortcomings in Tappan's account, it does make important headway that can be supplemented by other aspects of Vygotsky's developmental model. An amendment to Tappan's account might, for example, make better use of the aforementioned notion of MKOs and ZPD. Vygotsky's theory might play out as follows: Upon being introduced to a moral behavior within a ZPD by a MKO, a learner begins the process of acquisition and internalization of the behavior. The first phase is imitation, wherein the learner attempts to properly emulate the behavior as deployed by the MKO.<sup>52</sup> At this phase, the learner is not functionally autonomous and still relies heavily upon MKOs for direction and support. As the collaboration progresses, the learner increasingly internalizes moral behavior, relying less upon MKOs as skill develops.

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<sup>52</sup> Note that this notion of imitation differs from imitation as mindless copying; in the Vygotskian view, imitation is a sort of thoughtful mimicry, wherein the learner has some basic understanding of elements of both the scenario in which a behavior is deployed and the behavior itself (Vygotsky 1934/1987, 210).

As previously noted, MKOs may never completely drop out of the picture; the learner may continue to refine deployment of the behavior. Again, however, this is not the mark of maturity in the Vygotskian system. Rather, maturity of skill is reached once the learner can reliably and effectively deploy the target behavior(s) him- or herself. Additionally, it is important to note that, in the Vygotskian system, learners are not "merely mimicking" the behaviors of MKOs, but actually developing multiple levels of understanding of behaviors, forging a connection between the behaviors and particular emotions (e.g., as when sympathizing), as well as how and when to deploy them. One might say that moral competence, then, involves the process of cultivating our psychological dispositions according to what is reasonable in a particular scenario. This cultivation yields bases for how to relate to others and how to respond to, and sympathize with, them.

Even with this revised account, however, it is still unclear how, precisely, moral learning hooks up with the affective and motivational mechanisms that Vygotsky seems to predict. This gap might be partially filled by drawing upon current research, particularly from socialization theory. Socialization is described by Joan E. Grusec (2014) as "the process by which individuals are helped to become functioning members of the group to which they belong" (334). This, of course, resonates with the ideals of the school espoused by both Sprod and Dewey: one of the aims of education *should* be to help students develop into functional members of the community.<sup>53</sup> While socialization theory makes no such normative claims about the necessity of moral education, it does go into detail about how precisely the process of socialization itself might take hold. In particular, it focuses upon the myriad ways in which young children internalize value systems. This internalization

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<sup>53</sup> Vygotsky, too, emphasizes the importance of social functionality.

process, Grusec notes, is *not* a matter of passively adopting values for “external reasons”<sup>54</sup> (e.g., fear of punishment or desire for gain); rather, it is an active process in which children, via interaction with others, come to develop value systems as part of an overall approach to social engagement via a reflective worldview (335).<sup>55</sup> To this end, children, parents, and other mentor figures will be engaged in an ongoing dialogue in which (as anticipated in the Vygotskian framework) the children are frequently taking in, pushing back, and reconstructing their social perspectives. Parents and mentors, in the meantime, continue to provide social guidance to child learners, also adapting (or adapting to) the dialogue as necessary. Socialization, then, might make use of a variety of resources and styles of interaction to ensure that children effectively develop the requisite psychosocial capacities to ensure that they can functionally interact with others.

In line with socialization theory, many researchers have attempted to record particular behaviors and tools that are often employed in inculcating prosocial, promoral behaviors in young children. In particular, discussion of the socialization of affect (i.e., inculcation of promoral emotions) has been addressed in terms of parent-child interactions, specifically through discourse. As Patricia M. Clancy (1999) observes, “As children begin to understand adult speech and to use affect words to which adults can respond, language becomes an important vehicle for the cultural shaping of emotional experience” (1398).<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Grusec’s use of the phrase “external reasons” refers merely to reasons related to incentives and aversions. This may differ from philosophical uses, such as those appearing in the work of John McDowell and Bernard Williams, for whom external and internal reasons have much more sophisticated meanings.

<sup>55</sup> Although Grusec does not describe it as such, reflectivity is a key feature for socialization theorists, since it implies that the agent internalizes and utilizes the value itself rather than relying merely upon a scheme of compliance for the purposes of avoiding punishment and securing rewards.

<sup>56</sup> Following Heidi Fung (1999): Language here is defined much more broadly as discursive pragmatics. As such, it goes beyond syntactical and representational systems and includes not only the said, but also the suggested, the implied, and the unsaid (185).

Emotional development is widely held to involve a combination of both innate and social components. As summarized by Chiung-chih Huang (2011), several basic emotions (e.g., anger, sadness, joy, and surprise) appear either at birth or during relatively fixed times early in a child's development; it is only after around the second year of age that children start to deploy more complex emotions (e.g., shame, guilt, envy, and pride), and at this point, socialization is already well underway (595).<sup>57</sup> What researchers such as Clancy and Huang have found is that parent-child dialogue is frequently both affect- and value-laden when it comes to discussions of morally charged experiences. Heidi Fung (1999), involved in the similar research, refers to these instances as "opportunity education," noting that concrete experiences provide parents chances to educate their children on relevant moral issues that can be connected to situations in which children's emotions were invoked (189-190).

Across their research, Clancy, Fung, and Huang all make several interesting and consistent discoveries. First, parents employ a number of techniques to relate and elicit affective responses to events with their children.

[Communicative] markers included verbal (e.g., name-callings, derogatory attributions, threats of abandonment, invoking a third party to sit in judgment of the child, social comparisons, warnings of punishment), paralinguistic (e.g., emphatic stress, angry intonation, loud or slow delivery), vocal (e.g., sighs, making disapproving sounds), nonverbal techniques (e.g., displaying shame gesture such as staring at the child, frowning, pursing up lips, removing the child from his/her favorite toy or snack, or enacting physical punitive acts) as well as reticence and silence. (Fung 1999, 192)

The wide array of markers employed suggests that the communication of information plays a key role in the structure of how parents help to guide children toward moral behavior by

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<sup>57</sup> Huang cites the studies of Izard et al. (1982, 1993, 1995), Camras et al. (1992), and Lewis et al. (1989). Philosophers will no doubt also be reminded of Paul Ekman's (1992) theorizing on basic emotions.



relating events either directly to affective responses or to affectively laden states of affairs. Additionally, the fact that much communication can occur at the nonverbal level suggests that there are more subtle modes of communication, some of which may be inherently intertwined with affective states (e.g., frowning to instill in the child the sense that one does not approve of the child's behavior).<sup>58</sup> This would imply that language might be only one means of effective communication for socialization, or that the account of language-learning that undergirds sociomoral development might need to be more sophisticated than the simple account given by Tappan.

Second, it has been observed that parents tend to employ certain communicative strategies that match a child's present state of psychosocial development. In younger children, it is often more effective to appeal to sensorimotor terms to elicit the desired association between a target behavior and social approval or disapproval. As Clancy notes,

Rather than sadness, these mothers and children talk about physical pain (*itai*, 'painful; ouch') and the main expression of distress for these children, crying. This emphasis on pain and crying is typical at this stage; the most frequent affect words of English-speaking two-year-olds are cry and *hurt* (Bretherton and Beeghly, 1982; Dunn et al., 1987; Wellman et al., 1995). (Clancy 1999, 1405)

The implication is that the association of affect with behavioral norms is in many ways a gradual process of learning that makes use of a child's native endowments.<sup>59</sup> As the child's psychology becomes increasingly sophisticated, in large part a result of continuing socialization under a caretaker's guidance, so too can the means of interaction. Discussion of crying, for example, can be substituted with discussion of sadness and fear; at later

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<sup>58</sup> See, for example, Sterponi's (2014) account of minimal prompting.

<sup>59</sup> Again, we need not adopt strong nativism here.

stages, this discussion can be further enhanced by discussion of even more complex conceptualizations (e.g., justice, reciprocity, etc.).

Third, and related to the second point, it is possible to categorize types of affect words that are typically included in socializing discourse. Huang notes five types:

- (1) Type I: Predicates that encode a specific affective state and can take an experiencer as subject (e.g., *gaoxing* ‘be glad’).
- (2) Type II: Predicates that describe a referent in terms of the affect it evokes (e.g., *youqu* ‘interesting’).
- (3) Type III: Words having clear positive/negative valence (e.g., *hao* ‘good’), including evaluative characterizations of people and their actions (e.g., *yonggan* ‘brave’) and descriptions of physical properties or sensory perceptions with affective connotations (e.g., *haochi* ‘delicious’).
- (4) Type IV: Predicates referring to actions with affective motivations (e.g., *ku* ‘cry’) and physical events or states with predictable positive or negative affective consequences (e.g., *shoushang* ‘get hurt’).
- (5) Type V: Formulaic expressions of gratitude, apology, and regret (e.g., *xiexie* ‘thank you’). (599)<sup>60</sup>

The consistent use of such language lends credence to the idea that discursive interactions can be used as tools to structure moral interactions by means of imbuing particular expressions and speech acts with affective content. In doing so, parents might be construed as helping children to form baselines for prototypical moral interactions.<sup>61</sup>

These findings lead Clancy to propose that the socialization of affect involves an informal program of modeling (e.g., imitating parent behavior), direct instruction (e.g., via parent-child discourse on a specific topic), and negotiation (in which children interact and sometimes “push back” in conversation with parents) (1417).<sup>62</sup> It is noteworthy that this is compatible with the Vygotskian position. As Huang observes:

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<sup>60</sup> Huang’s study investigates discourse in Chinese culture in particular, but similar observations can be made in other cultures. See, for example Sterponi (2014), Grusec (2014), and Nucci (2014).

<sup>61</sup> This is an idea that I will discuss in greater detail in later chapters.

<sup>62</sup> Huang (2011) also supports Clancy’s hypothesis (599).

According to Vygotsky (1978), the gap between what a novice has already mastered (the actual level of development) and what he or she can achieve when provided with support (potential development) is called ‘the zone of proximal development’. Thus, in the socialization process the child develops skills in the ‘zone of proximal development’ with the guidance and collaboration from adults (Cazden 1981; Rogoff & Lave 1984; Vygotsky 1978; Wertsch 1985; Wertsch, Minick & Arns 1984). (595)

With this in mind, then, we might begin seeking amendments to Tappan’s gloss on Vygotsky in the following way: language is a fundamental tool for moral development within a community insofar as it provides an expedient (and likely primary) means of transmitting information between mentor and learner figures. It is not, however, the sole means of providing guidance for moral education, nor is language comprehension the sole mechanism involved in moral inculcation. In the examples of parent-child discourse, language is used as a means to an end: parents might encourage children by framing certain experiences in a positive light, thereby increasing the likelihood that the child will have a positive affective reaction to the experiences and composite behaviors (e.g., “I smile when you *x*”); parents can discourage children by eliciting negative affective reactions upon reflection of experiences (e.g., “When you did *x*, it made your friend cry”); parents can also preload affective reactions by directing children’s attention to certain features of experiences and suggesting hypotheticals (e.g., “How would you feel?”). Verbal discourse is not the only means of accomplishing these ends. Feelings regarding behaviors can also be communicated by gestures (e.g., a stern look).

It also stands to reason that there are other tools available for moral inculcation, both verbal and nonverbal. As Barbara Rogoff and Gilda Morelli (1989) point out, features of one’s sociocultural context can greatly impact competence in all manner of skills, both social and nonsocial alike (12). Perceptual modelling, for example, can be highly

influenced by one's social environment, features of which (e.g., the orientation of one's culture toward hunting-gathering or manufacturing) may influence how one goes about analyzing tasks that involve pattern-seeking or the grouping of items based on common themes.<sup>63</sup> This is because the relevant features of one's community can ultimately color how one approaches such tasks: seeing one's elders frequently perform a task a certain way, for example, may provide a novice learner with a model for how to act accordingly. Such models can be construed as tools to internalize for resolving relevant problems.

For moral development in particular, the important feature of such tools is that they must bridge the gap between the perceptual-rational and the affective. Put simply: they must succeed in reliably eliciting the appropriate emotional and/or motivating responses in learners that will drive them to behave in a manner that accords with morality.<sup>64</sup> Clancy provides several examples in which affect is associated with language, including storybooks and narratives, as well as the context of pretend play (1411).<sup>65</sup> With this in mind, we might shift the focus from moral competence as an offshoot of linguistic competence to moral competence as part of general social competence, with language providing an important, but merely facilitating, mediatory role. Real competence can only develop when the language is placed within the context of the community (including its

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<sup>63</sup> See, for example, Fu et al. (2007) and Unsworth, Sears, and Pexman (2005).

<sup>64</sup> Parental instruction might be an effective means of doing this during early childhood, due to the still emerging nature of a child's social comprehension skills. It is, of course, questionable whether such manners of instruction and prompting (or at least their analogues, whatever they might be) will continue to be reliable after early childhood. This is an empirical matter and one not easily resolved, but I will attempt to provide an account of why we might be cautiously optimistic about this in succeeding chapters.

<sup>65</sup> Clancy cites in particular findings by the following authors: Bretherton and Beehly (1982), Beehly et al. (1986), Brown and Dunn (1991), and Kuebli, Butler, and Fivush (1995).

values) as a whole.<sup>66</sup> If Sterelny's account of the development and perpetuation of social norms is correct, then there is an easy explanation for how this might occur, since both the communal value and language systems will be largely stable over time and perpetuated across multiple generations, thus structuring the environment into which new learners are introduced. To fill the gap left in Vygotsky's account, then, we must replace Tappan's linguistic competence approach with whatever tools are required to better develop the cultural sensibilities that align with a community's particular value system.

These suggestions are, of course, still a long way off from providing any definitive account of how to fill in the gaps for moral education in a Vygotskian model, but they do provide a good starting point. What is necessary from here is to consider just what specific sorts of social tools can be utilized to do the work that needs to be done to get the endeavor of moral education, and in turn the process of moral development, off the ground. Specifically, it is worth emphasizing that the tools to which we look should function such that they can promote the development of moral education as part of a coherent, social project, "coherent" here referring to the pervasive and unifying nature of morality. This means that we should expect the tools of moral development to be broadly shared and accessible among members of a given community, but also specifically tuned to moral endeavors in particular. Language, again, is no doubt a valuable tool that plays a part in this developmental process, but for the aforementioned reasons, it cannot be the sole (or perhaps even primary) social tool of moral development.

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<sup>66</sup> Similar points are made by Ochs and Schieffelin (1984, 277), as well as Fung (1999, 180).

## 2.8 Conclusion

The takeaway from this chapter should not be that Vygotsky's account of learning is incapable of yielding a basic framework for a theory and program of moral development; the Vygotskian position does provide moral education with a *partial* foundation, especially insofar as many of its elements align with findings by socialization theorists. Vygotsky himself, however, never produced an account of the interaction of moral development and moral learning. While Tappan's language-based account might take steps in the right direction to generating a Vygotskian account of moral learning and development, it is notably incomplete. More is needed to yield a *complete* foundation for moral education projects. To these ends, in this project, I aim to provide a modern, empirically informed analysis of one tradition of thought on moral education, particularly the Confucian program in ritual, and to argue that we can use a notion of ritual abstracted from this tradition as a resource for augmenting moral education and development in a modern context.

## CHAPTER 3

### CONFUCIAN RITUAL, A DEFINITION

Following the idea that a Vygotskian approach to moral education will require a particular type of sociocultural artifact, this chapter introduces a potential resource from pre-Qin Confucianism,<sup>67</sup> namely ritual. “Ritual” in the sense particular to Confucianism is difficult to explain. The character rendered as “ritual,” 禮 (*li*), has several meanings, “ritual” simply being the common translation. Additionally, the Confucians never provide a concise definition of the term, instead giving explanations of its various functions. It is necessary, then, to provide an explicit account of what the Confucian notion of ritual entails. I proceed in four phases. First, I distinguish Confucian ritual from traditional Western notions, as well as between two primary conceptions of ritual within Confucianism: ritual as a prescription and ritual as a disposition. Second, I explain how the prescriptive notion pertains to certain performances and social divisions. Third, I contrast ritual with other recurring concepts in Confucianism that might be thought to play a similar role in moral development (e.g., laws, punishments, and other political measures). Finally, I recommend that Confucian ritual be understood as those prescriptions governing the practices and standards that embody expressions of respect and related prosocial attitudes.

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<sup>67</sup> Strains of Confucianism are conventionally distinguished as being classical/pre-Qin (i.e., coming before the Qin Dynasty which lasted from 221 BCE until 206 BCE) or post-Qin.

### 3.1 Distinguishing notions of ritual in Confucianism

Part of what makes understanding ritual in the Confucian tradition so difficult for Western scholars is that we are already inundated with our own theories of ritual. Most of these accounts relegate ritual to the realm of religion and base explanations of ritual on practices that are often construed as having some supernatural component (typically a shared belief in a higher power). Emile Durkheim (1912/1915/1965), in his account of religion, depicts ritual as helping distinguish between the ‘sacred’ and the ‘profane’:

A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things . . . things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite in one single community called a Church, all those who adhere to them. (47)

Certain cultural artifacts and behaviors, such as rituals, are treated as *sacred* insofar as they are regarded as being part of an overarching religion, specifically in their capacity for promoting and furthering said religion’s unity and goals. The *profane*, in contrast, refers to anything outside the realm of those behaviors and artifacts appropriated by the religion. As such, although the profane need not necessarily be construed as evil or counterproductive to the sacred, the elements composing the profane are inessential to the maintenance of a religion except in the sense that they comprise a contrast class.

Claude Levi-Strauss (1966) seemingly coopts Durkheim’s sacred-profane dichotomy to give an account that explains the role of ritual:

A native thinker makes the penetrating comment that ‘All sacred things must have their place’ (Fletcher 2, p. 34). It could even be said that being in their place is what makes them sacred, for if they were taken out of place, even in thought, the entire order of the universe would be destroyed. Sacred objects therefore contribute to the maintenance of order in the universe by occupying the places allocated to them. Examined superficially and from the outside, the refinements of ritual can appear pointless. (10)

This account highlights the role of ritual as a *meaning-maker*. Ritual transforms objects



and behaviors, imbuing them with symbolic purpose that is appropriated within the scheme of a particular religion. In so doing, ritual organizes objects, behaviors, and people for the purpose of establishing a set order within a religious context. Thus, a primary function of ritual is that it helps to construct the space of practice inhabited by adherents of a religion.

Approaches treating ritual as religious by default are problematic for Confucianism, wherein rituals extend well beyond what would traditionally be considered religious practice by Western thinkers.<sup>68</sup> Confucius's *Analects*, for example, states that morally laudable conduct requires that one adhere to ritual, implying that ritual governs not only behaviors in religious or seemingly religious ceremonies, but also mundane elements of life.<sup>69</sup> Xunzi also depicts ritual as covering a wide array of behavior:

If your exertions of blood, *qi*,<sup>70</sup> intention, and thought accord with ritual, they will be ordered and effective. If they do not accord with ritual, they will be disorderly and unproductive. If your meals, clothing, dwelling, and activities accord with ritual, they will be congenial and well-regulated. If they do not accord with ritual, you will encounter dangers and illnesses. If your countenance, bearing, movements, and stride accord with ritual, they will be graceful. If they do not accord with ritual, they will be barbaric, obtuse, perverse, vulgar, and unruly. (*Xunzi* 2/5/12-15)<sup>71</sup>

Xunzi's willingness to suggest that effectively all human behaviors should be structured according to ritual may be a rhetorical device to emphasize the centrality of ritual to the overall Confucian program, but it nonetheless illustrates the pervasiveness of ritual's applicability to daily, mundane human affairs. The traditional Western conception of rituals

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<sup>68</sup> Herbert Fingarette (1972) gives an extended treatment of this very point.

<sup>69</sup> See, for example, *Analects* 6.27/14/10: The Master said, "The gentleman, by broadly studying culture and holding himself in accord with ritual, will never overstep what is right."

<sup>70</sup> "*Qi*," in classical Chinese metaphysics, can be loosely understood as the "material energy" of living things.

<sup>71</sup> Citations from classical Chinese texts use ICS numbering. Translations are the author's own unless indicated. This particular translation is taken from Eric Hutton's (2014) translation of the *Xunzi*.

does not extend to all “meals, clothing, dwelling, and activities”; when it does, these instances are typically considered to be special occasions that are themselves moments of commemoration of some significant event or personage (e.g., feast days). The Confucian notion of ritual, in contrast, regards ritual as applicable to human interactions in all sorts of situations, regardless of particular significance that a day or period of time might possess.

The notion of ritual addressed by Confucians is broader than Western conceptions in several other ways as well. First, Confucians discuss ritual not only in the context of particular practices (e.g., burial rites), but also systems of social divisions and as a disposition in itself. Regarding social divisions, rituals are intended to provide organization within the community by marking out distinctions of right and wrong, noble and base, and superior or inferior. Xunzi provides the following example:

In ritual, noble and lowly have their proper ranking, elder and youth have their proper distance, poor and rich, humble and eminent, each have their proper weights. Thus, the Son of Heaven wears a red dragon-robe and a high ceremonial cap. The feudal lords wear black dragon-robcs and high ceremonial caps. The grand officers wear lesser robes and high ceremonial caps. The regular officers wear fur caps and plain robes. One's virtue must have a matching position, one's position must have a matching salary, and one's salary must have matching uses. (*Xunzi* 10/43/1-3)

One main purpose of these divisions, according to Xunzi, is to ameliorate tensions within a community regarding desires for resources and power. Ritual outlines not only the proper behaviors for humans, but also ranks them within the community and provides a model for allotting roles and resources based upon said roles. In so doing, it also formally establishes certain relationships between members of the community and, again, the proper behaviors to undertake with regard to said relationships and the roles between which they are set. These demarcations are significantly different from the Durkheimian perspective of ritual as differentiating the sacred and the profane: for Confucians, ritual does not always mark

special spaces of practice within the community; rather, the divisions it produces structure the society as a whole and need not be especially performative (as with the example of merely wearing certain clothing to denote one's rank/office) to accomplish this end.

Further contrast can be found in the second aspect of Confucian ritual: the dispositional notion. The dispositional notion of ritual can be roughly understood as a sense of propriety, particularly with regard to expressions of respect for others. As explained by Mengzi, ritual has as its root innate tendencies in humans for deferring and yielding.<sup>72</sup> These tendencies, it is worth noting, are primarily affective in nature (i.e., they are understood as feelings, attitudes, or emotions), as is evidenced by Mengzi's describing them as (or as matters of) *xin* (心), a term typically transcribed as "mind," "heart," or even "heart-mind." By building upon these tendencies, one can refine oneself to follow a more formal sensibility of propriety when engaging with others. Although pre-Qin Confucians dispute whether there is an innate tendency toward ritual propriety,<sup>73</sup> all of the major figures appeal to a sense of ritual as propriety and regard its enactment as being a refined matter of showing respect to others. This project will not focus upon the dispositional sense of ritual, for reasons that I will clarify, but the element of respect will remain a feature of the account of Confucian ritual developed here. Suffice it to say that this understanding of ritual is not as widely represented in the Western, performative conception of ritual.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> See *Mengzi* 3.6/18/8-9: "The feeling of deference and yielding is the sprout of ritual propriety."

<sup>73</sup> Confucius is noncommittal on the topic, stating merely that humans, by nature, are "close" or "similar" (*Analects* 17.2/47/27) and Xunzi outright rejects the idea of humans being innately good (see Book 23: "[Human] Nature is Bad").

<sup>74</sup> I should clarify that I am not suggesting that the sensibility itself is foreign to Western thought; it clearly is not (e.g., one's sense of decorum, paying one's respects, etc.). Rather, the strength of the association of this sensibility with ritual is atypical of Western thought, both in terms of the frequency of the association as well as the pervasiveness of ritual within a community that is inherent in the Confucian tradition.

A final feature worth noting that characterizes ritual in Confucianism is that the Confucians regard ritual in general as a tool not only for moral cultivation, but also for structuring government. Specifically, the Confucians' system intends for ritual to provide an effective means of governance due to its ability to educate and order the population. Their rationale for this approach is that political tools such as laws and punishments do not in and of themselves possess any capacity for rectifying human character (i.e., making people morally good). On the contrary, appeal to laws and punishments exclusively may have an adverse effect on the moral goodness of the community. As noted by Confucius:

Guide them with government edicts, regulate them with punishments, and the people will be evasive and lack shame. Guide them with virtue, order them with ritual, and they will have shame and even order themselves.  
(*Analects* 2.3/2/29-30)

The Confucians assert that penalizing people for wrong action at best ensures they have an understanding of what is unacceptable; it does not provide deeper explanation for *why* it is unacceptable, let alone what is *right*. Moreover, punishment works by playing on people's fear of harm (and desire for gain), and the Confucians desire a community in which people are motivated by promoral considerations as well. The Confucians do not regard a state governed solely or mainly by punishment as being conducive to harmony, since it does nothing to inculcate these prosocial motivations and dispositions that are presumed necessary for the flourishing of both the group at large and the individual in particular.

These differences do not mean that there is no overlap between Western and Confucian understandings of ritual, but they show that the Confucian texts cannot be understood exclusively through a traditional Western lens. If we are to understand the manner in which Confucian ritual is supposed to aid in moral development, then we must broaden our concept of ritual to accommodate the distinctive features of ritual as discussed

by Confucians. The remainder of this chapter explores in detail the breadth and depth of the Confucian conception of both what counts as ritual and its place in a socioethical structure. Although I leave it for the subsequent chapter to discuss some of the functions of ritual in greater detail, this chapter gives insight regarding what Confucian ritual *is* and provides a foundation both for the explanations of function as well as the project of how ritual might inform and support moral education methodology as a whole.

### 3.2 Ritual prescriptions: performances and divisions

For the purposes of this project, we are primarily concerned with the prescriptive sense of ritual. To better understand the prescriptive notion, we must examine *how* and *what* ritual prescribes. Recall that the prescriptive ritual covers two things: specific performances and social divisions. In each, ritual provides guidelines for how to go about behaving or approaching social situations. These sorts of prescriptions are not mutually exclusive, but since social divisions can provide the basis and context of particular performances, they differ enough that each warrants a separate explanation. Ritual prescriptions of the first sort are likely the most obvious and familiar, so I will begin there.

That rituals can be thought of as performances is largely noncontentious; it is sensible to say, in English, that one “performed the ritual.”<sup>75</sup> What is important to recognize about Confucianism, however, is that its notion of ritual is specifically a *norm* of performance.<sup>76</sup> A good reason for making this clarification comes from the fact that, from an anthropological perspective, one might construe a community’s rituals as the way

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<sup>75</sup> Chinese: “行禮.”

<sup>76</sup> This sense is also operative in Western discussions of ritual, especially those from a theological perspective (in contrast to anthropological ones, which tend to focus on a descriptive account). So this sense is not *exclusively* Confucian, but it is important to emphasize for the sake of understanding the position.

people behave. For the Confucians, however, this would be a mistake: people can certainly fail to perform according to ritual, or simply forego ritual altogether. The anthropological-performative account also fails to make clear the distinction between what is ritual and what is mere convention. I will address this point in greater detail shortly but, for the time being, it is best to avoid reducing the notion of ritual here to a particular sort of performance and, rather, to think of ritual as a *prescription* for (a particular sort of) performance.

As noted earlier, rituals provide regulations for human actions and behaviors. The scope of these prescriptions varies among Confucians,<sup>77</sup> but all the pre-Qin Confucians agree that rituals play an important part in cultivating and deploying promoral dispositions. Specifically, one cultivates these dispositions through extended practice, during which one conditions oneself not only to abide by, but to *enjoy* acting according to ritual:

Ritual and *yi*<sup>78</sup> are the beginning of order. The gentleman<sup>79</sup> is the beginning of ritual and *yi*. Practicing them, habituating oneself in them, accumulating great regard for them, and making oneself fond of them—these are the beginning of becoming a gentleman. (*Xunzi* 9/39/2-3)

The rituals are a collection of standards of behavior laid down by the ancient sage kings.

The Confucians hold that, by instantiating these rituals, people rectified themselves and the

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<sup>77</sup> Xunzi seems to extend ritual to almost all matters of daily living, insisting that all affairs must be governed by ritual. Confucius, at least in the *Analects*, suggests that at least those behaviors pertaining to morally laden interactions must accord with ritual and also lauds ritual extensively. Mengzi, while noting the importance of prescriptive ritual, says comparably less on the topic, possibly implying a more lax position.

<sup>78</sup> Xunzi commonly pairs “禮義” or “ritual and *yi*.” While the two terms appear to be conceptually separable, they are frequently discussed in conjunction as the two great creations of the sage kings. *Yi* is typically translated as “righteousness,” but can be better understood as a standard for roles and relationships that must be internalized through education. Insofar as one adheres to this standard, one is said to be righteous (see Hutton’s explanation of *yi* in the appendix for his 2014 translation of the *Xunzi*). While this project is focused chiefly upon the role of ritual, it is important to acknowledge that *yi* also plays an important role in (at least Xunzi’s conception of) moral education: *yi* is a standard and virtue of right action, and a norm for roles and relationships; ritual is a collection of prescriptions for appropriate performances and their contexts.

<sup>79</sup> The character translated as “gentleman” is *junzi* (君子), and is used by the Confucians to refer to a typical moral exemplar. Other such exemplars include the scholar (*shi*, 士) and the sage (*shengren*, 聖人).

empire became harmonious. The veracity of this story is a separate issue. What is important is that ritual is treated as an educational tool intended to guide and constrain behaviors and psychological (particularly affective) states, hence its prescriptive nature.

Although the entirety of what behaviors were considered to have been prescribed by ritual is unknown, there are many examples of ritual practices discussed throughout the major Confucian texts. In the *Analects*, an entire book is dedicated to discussing Confucius's conduct at court, in public, and at home.<sup>80</sup> Insofar as ritual is supposed to govern the conduct of a moral exemplar (i.e., *junzi* or “gentleman”), and Confucius is supposed to play such a role, we can take this text as providing examples of ritual practice. Xunzi explicitly dedicates an entire book to ritual, at times going into great detail of what certain rituals require. Regarding burial practices:

For the burial offerings, among the hats there is to be a helmet, but no straps for binding the hair. There are to be various vessels and containers, but they are to be empty and unfilled. There are to be mats, but no bedding materials. The wooden utensils are not to be completely carved, the pottery utensils are not to be finished products, and the utensils woven from reeds are not to be capable of holding things. A set of pipes is to be prepared, but they are not to be harmonized. A lute and zither are to be laid out, but they are not to be tuned. A chariot is to be included in the burial, but the horse returns home. This is to indicate that these things will not be used.

One prepares the utensils used in life and takes them to the tomb, and this resembles the way one acts when moving house. The burial goods are to be simple and not perfect. They are to have the appearance of the regular items but are not to be functional. One drives a chariot out to the tomb and buries it, but the bit ornaments, bridle, and harness are not to be included. This makes clear that these things will not be used. One uses the semblance of moving house, but also makes clear that the things will not be used, and these are all means by which to heighten sorrow. And so, the utensils used in life have their proper form but are not functional, and the burial goods have the appearance of the regular items but are not used. (*Xunzi* 19/95/9-13)<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> This is, at least, a traditional interpretation of the content of Book 10 of the *Analects*.

<sup>81</sup> See also Xunzi's discussion of the *xiang* sacrifice (*Xunzi* 19/91/7-8).

This example illustrates the sophisticated nature of ritual performance itself and the complex underlying theory of symbolism built into said performances. One facet of rituals is that they embody certain ideas or attitudes. In burial offerings, one gives items for the deceased that they would have required in life, but only provides items that are worn or imperfect in some significant way. The purpose is to simultaneously express reverence for the deceased while also *acknowledging* that person's passing and moving on accordingly. Similar sentiments are expressed in even simple rituals such as bowing: the time and location of one's bowing can be construed as an expression of arrogance or reverence.<sup>82</sup>

Rituals also prescribe social divisions. This aspect is characteristic of the Confucian conception of ritual: social divisions are not performances themselves, nor are they prescriptions for performances;<sup>83</sup> rather, social divisions refer specifically to the distinctions used to demarcate ranks, roles, and relationships within a community.<sup>84</sup> Such distinctions are thought to be of value to communities since they regulate how resources are allotted to constituents, as well as the roles that need to be filled in the community. The story that Xunzi provides is one in which human communities, in the absence of rituals, *yi*, and ordering divisions, breed contention and strife since there is no formal notion of deference to others being applied and only a minimal sense of social organization:

If humans form communities but are without social divisions, then they will struggle. If they struggle, then there will be chaos. If there is chaos then they will disband. If they disband then they will be weak. If they are weak then

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<sup>82</sup> E.g., *Analects* 9.3/20/10-11: "Bowling below [the stairs] is prescribed by ritual. Now the practice is to bow after ascending. That is arrogant. Though it goes against the majority, I continue to bow below."

<sup>83</sup> One might argue that for social divisions to take effect, they must be *enacted* and are thus performative. For the sake of clarity, I treat the performative and divisive aspects of ritual as distinct (albeit related): the divisions still hold even if the roles are not properly enacted (e.g., one is still a minister even if one does a poor job of fulfilling ministerial rituals; one is simply a *bad* minister in such a case).

<sup>84</sup> See, for example, *Xunzi* 1/3/10: "Rituals are the great divisions in the model for things. Outlines of things' proper classes are in the rituals found."



they cannot overcome the animals. And so they will not get to live in homes and palaces. This is the meaning of saying that “one must not let go of ritual and *yi* for even a moment.” (*Xunzi* 9/39/15-6)

Xunzi’s general point about the importance of social divisions as a means of establishing communal standards is plausible enough. Without any resource for ordering the population, community members are left to fend for themselves with regard to deciding how to fairly and effectively organize allotments of material goods and political power. This can at least potentially lead to members of the community coming into conflict about how best to go about pursuing the distribution of resources and power. As a result of this conflict, the community destabilizes and ultimately dissolves (or, at least, is too weak to support itself).

A crucial part of preventing such dissolution, according to Xunzi, is ritual:

From what did ritual arise? I say: Humans are born having desires. When they have desires but do not get the objects of their desire, then they cannot but seek some means of satisfaction. If there is no measure or limit to their seeking, then they cannot help but struggle with each other. If they struggle with each other then there will be chaos, and if there is chaos then they will be impoverished. The former kings hated such chaos, and so established rituals and *yi* in order to allot things to people, to nurture their desires, and to satisfy their seeking. They caused desires never to exhaust material goods, and material goods never to be depleted by desires, so that the two support each other and prosper. This is how ritual arose. (*Xunzi* 19/90/3-5)

By providing a means of nurturing desires, rituals are intended to forestall the chaotic outcome of dispute over the distribution of resources. Distribution is itself guided by divisions established by ritual to differentiate between those of higher and lower merit.<sup>85</sup>

In this way, ritual is intended to order the community on economic and political levels.

Order is also established by ritual in terms of structuring particular social roles, their duties, and the relationships between social roles:

“May I inquire about how to be a person’s lord?” I say: Make divisions and

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<sup>85</sup> See the aforementioned distinctions from Book 10 of the *Xunzi* on differences in dress.

distributions according to ritual. Be even-handed, inclusive, and not one-sided. “May I inquire about how to be a person’s minister?” I say: Serve your lord according to ritual. Be loyal, compliant, and not lazy. “May I inquire about how to be a person’s father?” I say: Be broadminded, kind, and follow the dictates of ritual. “May I inquire about how to be a person’s son?” I say: Be respectful, loving, and have utmost good form. “May I inquire about how to be a person’s elder brother?” I say: Be compassionate, loving, and display friendliness. “May I inquire about how to be a person’s younger brother?” I say: Be respectful, acquiescent, and do nothing improper. “May I inquire about how to be a person’s husband?” I say: Be extremely hard-working and do not stray. Be extremely watchful and follow proper distinctions. “May I inquire about the proper way to be a person’s wife?” I say: If your husband follows the dictates of ritual, then compliantly obey him and wait upon him attentively. If your husband does not follow the dictates of ritual, then be apprehensive but keep yourself respectful. (*Xunzi* 12/57/23-6)

In this excerpt, *Xunzi* addresses four sorts of relationships and explains how one may fulfill one’s role in each. It is worth noting that within his explanations, *Xunzi* advocates that one rely heavily upon ritual as a resource for properly enacting one’s duties. This provides a means of tying the aspect of ritual as performance to the aspect of ritual as distinction: in establishing divisions within the realm of the social, ritual is able to prescribe the behaviors particular to the various social roles. In this way, both the performance and the division are related while also being sufficiently distinct so as to warrant separate discussions.

Before proceeding further, it should be emphasized that ritual prescriptions are not rigid in nature (i.e., they need not be followed slavishly). The Confucians demonstrate awareness of the fact that circumstances may call for flexibility of action that may, on the face of things, call for certain “tweaks” to rituals as they may be traditionally prescribed. Confucius himself, for example, acknowledged the importance of practicality in expenditures when substituting a silk cap for a linen one (*Analects* 9.3/20/10), despite the traditional prescriptions of ritual, and may have accommodated at least some changes in

traditional practices such as meals.<sup>86</sup> These are superficial alterations, but nonetheless suggest that there is some room for flexibility in following ritual.

Mengzi and Xunzi also remark on the sense in which following ritual does not require strict adherence to tradition; rather, what is valued is behaving such that one does not cause suffering and discord. This may, at times, require one to behave in a manner that does not at first appear to accord with ritual, but may align with ritual in the sense that it has the effect that ritual is intended to have. According to Xunzi,

Ritual has making people's hearts agreeable as its root. And so, those things that are not in the *Classic of Rituals*<sup>87</sup> yet make people's hearts agreeable are still things that carry ritual propriety. (*Xunzi* 27/127/22)

If we take the *Classic of Rituals* to be an at least mostly authoritative compendium of ritual practices themselves, then Xunzi's remark implies that certain actions might still accomplish the ends of ritual without necessarily fitting the prescriptions (at least according to their traditional accounts) exactly. These actions are still said to carry "ritual propriety" insofar as they might be thought of acting either as suitable substitutes for prescribed rituals or as rituals unto themselves since they are directed toward the same ends as ritual (e.g., benevolence, respect for others, etc.).

It makes sense, then, to distinguish the Confucian conception of ritual from conceptions regarding ritual as an absolutely fixed practice. While the latter conception applies to the manner in which ritual is sometimes treated in Confucianism, it does not

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<sup>86</sup> According to *Analects* 10.8/24/17: "He did not remove the ginger from the table, but he did not consume much of it." Slingerland (2003), following Brooks and Brooks (1998, 62), suggests that this may refer to the fact that ginger was a novelty during Confucius's time, and may have been regarded with suspicion by traditionalists (104).

<sup>87</sup> The *Classic of Rituals* almost certainly refers to a collection of ritual lore. Unfortunately, it is unclear to what particular text Xunzi is referring. No extant ritual compendia share this title, and difficulties in dating these and other ancient texts make it virtually impossible to know Xunzi's exact reference.

apply to those cases in which one is still said to uphold ritual even if one deviates from set practice. Mengzi addresses the issue of situations in which ritual seems to dictate that one behave in a manner that would be counterintuitive (or even antagonistic) to according with promoral behavior. When asked about whether it is permissible to deviate from the ritual prescription that unmarried males and females not touch for the sake of rescuing a drowning sister-in-law, Mengzi replies as follows:

A man who would not aid his drowning sister-in-law is a beast. That males and females not make contact when exchanging things is ritual. When a man's sister-in-law is drowning, he has the discretion to rescue her by use of his hand. (*Mengzi* 7.17/38/20-30)

There are two ways of understanding Mengzi's remarks, the first of which takes his claim to be that ritual may be set aside in particularly calamitous situations. This would mean that an agent is simply not bound by ritual in certain circumstances, such as the emergency described. In other words, there are scenarios in which ritual may be set aside (or at least substantially altered). Such an interpretation, however, seems to overlook Mengzi's comment that it is ritual that "males and females not make contact when exchanging things" ("exchanging" here is expressed as "授受" or "*shou*," and can be rendered as "handing off and receiving"). When discussing the rescue of the drowning sister-in-law, however, a different verb is used entirely, specifically "saving" ("援," "*yuan*"). This detail suggests that the event of drowning alters the circumstances of touching significantly, such that contact is permissible since saving someone is not the same as exchanging items. Alternatively, then, Mengzi can be understood as suggesting that this act, while not set by a particular ritual, does not actually violate ritual. If anything, one is morally obligated to rescue a drowning sister-in-law, so we should construe such a behavior as comporting with ritual insofar as ritual is meant to promote a stable and moral community.

### 3.3 Contrast between ritual and similar concepts

With the features of ritual in Confucianism laid out, it is worth distinguishing ritual from other recurring concepts in the early Confucian tradition that might be thought to play a similar role, such as laws, punishments, and other political measures. To be sure, the Confucians did regard such tools as playing important parts in good governance. As noted by Xunzi, the common people can and should be controlled by “legal arrangements,”<sup>88</sup> a claim that suggests the necessity of instruments of the state such as law and an established penal system as resources for managing civilians who may or may not possess the moral ability so lauded by the Confucians. Not (yet) possessing moral cultivation, such individuals are likely to respond best to legal mandates and penalties for transgressing said mandates. Clarity in such measures, then, is of great importance for a state’s functionality.

That being said, it is also clear from the writings of the Confucians that there is a conceptual difference between legal measures and ritual, and that ritual trumps and orders these measures in some way. When remarking upon the importance of clarity and accuracy in applying terms (a process called “rectifying names”), Confucius suggests that ritual’s flourishing in some way affects the execution of legal and penal practices:

If names be not rectified, then speech will not accord with the reality of things. If speech does not accord with the reality of things, then affairs will not reach completion. When affairs do not reach completion, ritual and music will not flourish. When ritual and music do not flourish, punishments and penalties will miss the mark. When punishments and penalties miss the mark, the people will not know where to set hand or foot. (*Analects* 13.3/34/1-3)

The sentiment that ritual is in some sense prior to legal and penal measures appears in the writings of Mengzi and Xunzi as well. Mengzi, for example, remarks that “laws cannot put

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<sup>88</sup> See, for example, *Xunzi* 10/43/3 and 15/75/1.

themselves into practice,” and that when “those above are without ritual, and those below are without education, traitorous people will arise and [the state] will quickly be lost” (7.1/35/31-2). Similarly, Xunzi claims that ritual is prior to law as a model for governance:

In serving as people’s ruler and superior, if the way that one treats the common people below is lacking in ritual, *yi*, loyalty, and trustworthiness, how can one think simply to make thoroughgoing use of rewards, prizes, punishments, penalties, circumstantial conditions, and deception to control one’s subordinates, subject them to austerity, and reap accomplishments and results from them? (*Xunzi* 15/73/12-3)

The point that Xunzi makes here resonates with one in the *Analects* regarding the inadequacy of laws and punishments: use of political-legal tools alone is not enough to ensure that a population will be orderly (let alone harmonious). Other resources, in this case ritual along with *yi*, loyalty, and trustworthiness, are also needed to effectively govern the population and retain order therein. What remains to be explained is precisely *how* ritual is supposed to perform as an effective resource in this regard and why it is the case that ritual can fill such a role while laws, punishments, and other political measures cannot.

Laws typically either prohibit certain actions (e.g., murder, theft, etc.) or make positive demands upon citizens (e.g., taxation). Although laws may incidentally align with moral values (e.g., laws prohibiting murder might be construed as aligning with a value for human life), laws need not inherently reflect, embody, or promulgate said values.<sup>89</sup> Punishments and penalties serve as measures for reinforcing the gravity of laws by providing tangible consequences for those who would break the laws. Ideally, the threat of punishment serves as a deterrent from breaking the law and prevents constituents of the

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<sup>89</sup> I should clarify that the conception of law with which I am working here is the one held by the Confucians themselves. Alternative conceptions may hold that laws are not truly laws (or bad laws) if they do not align with or promote promoral enterprises. For the Confucians, however, laws are simply edicts issued by the state, hence the concern regarding whether laws alone are capable of instilling moral rectitude.

population from turning against the rules of the state.

The problem that the Confucians perceive with this approach to government is that, on its own, it does nothing to ensure that the population will be well-ordered and stable: simply because laws and punishments are laid out and in place does not mean that people will not break the laws and attempt to avoid punishment.<sup>90</sup> Even in a state with an abundance of perfectly clear laws and well-enforced punishments, people may continue to deviate from what is regulated by law. Worse yet, if laws are tyrannically enforced and punishments become so severe in attempts to deter violations of the law, the population may become discontent and either flee the state or turn against the ruler. Such are the disastrous outcomes predicted from relying exclusively upon laws and punishments and employing no other measures for rectifying the state.

One function of ritual is to prevent such an outcome. It achieves this by education and transformation. Referring to the sage kings, Xunzi writes:

They made ritual and *yi* clear in order to transform [the people]. They set up laws and standards in order to make them well ordered. They multiplied punishments and fines in order to restrain them. As a result, they caused all under Heaven to come to order and conform to goodness. Such are the ordering influence of the sage kings and the transformative effects of ritual and *yi*. (*Xunzi* 23/115/3-6, modified)

While laws and punishments demarcate restrictions on behavior, they do not *necessarily* promote any prosocial, promoral values.<sup>91</sup> Laws and punishments are contingent upon the quality and policy of government (moral or otherwise). This means that laws and

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<sup>90</sup> Hence the “evasiveness” in *Analects* 2.3/2/29-30.

<sup>91</sup> Similar points are made by Tan Sor-hoon (2011) and Hagop Sarkissian (2014). Tan describes the relationship between law and ritual here as “complementary,” with both tools helping to establish social consensus and coordination (477). A key difference between the two, and one that Sarkissian echoes, is that ritual has an ethical focus that is not necessarily present in laws (Tan 2011, 478; Sarkissian 2014, 105-108).

punishments may vary wildly across contexts, and may even be at odds with prosocial, promoral values. Ritual, in contrast, is intended by Confucians to be more reliable: the values, divisions, and practices contained within ritual prescriptions are substantially more stable across both time and context because, presumably, they align with (and perhaps even establish) prosocial, promoral values. As such, ritual cannot be an arbitrary product of government, nor can it vary simply due to changes in a community's political structure.

Relatedly, another distinction involves the manner of enforcement. Laws are enforced by a government, and violating the laws is met with government-sanctioned penalties that are forcibly imposed (e.g., if you break the law, then the government may force you to pay a fine, go to jail, perform community service, etc.).<sup>92</sup> Violation of ritual, however, does not entail such punitive measures. Rather, according to the Confucians, one might face other negative consequences such as a damaged reputation. Such an outcome is potentially grave, since a damaged reputation can lead to a loss of respect from others. A loss of respect can have a number of deleterious effects, including being passed over for a promotion (or outright losing one's position), losing the trust of others, and being shunned by other members of one's community. If one is in a position of influence and violates ritual, then this could be disastrous, since it might lead to a public disregard for one's authority and an overall breakdown of the system that one previously oversaw. The enforcement of ritual, then, is more comparable to the manner in which etiquette is enforced than to the enforcement of laws.

A final distinction between legal arrangements and ritual is how to cope with

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<sup>92</sup> I use a very thin notion of "force" here. All I mean is that the government requires that one submit to a decided penalty and, if one refuses, then the government takes further action against the individual until it deems the results of said action to provide sufficient reparations for the violation of law.



improvisation/deviation from the standard. As mentioned in the previous section, if an act is morally good, then it can still accord with ritual (in some sense), even if it does not follow the traditional formalization. The flexibility that applies to ritual, however, does not apply to law, at least not flexibility of the same sort. We do, for example, admit for cases of “mitigating circumstances” in which what would have typically been considered a punishable violation of the law is allowed to pass. A common interpretation of such events is that circumstances were such that the law either makes a specific allowance for the deviation in question or that the law itself is problematic and should be revised. The same will not apply to ritual. First, for the Confucians, the rituals themselves *cannot* be problematic. This stems from the fact that the Confucians regard rituals to be the products of the sages. Accordingly, they are designed such that they will *only* alleviate problems and instantiate harmony. Second, and as previously mentioned, *complete* deviation from ritual is never considered morally permissible by the Confucians. Certain modifications to ritual are permissible when so demanded by circumstances, but the modifications are never so substantial that the bulk (or core) of the ritual prescription is altered.

### 3.4 Ritual as a prescription for respect and related humane dispositions

Given these explanations and distinctions, it is now possible to attempt a definition of ritual in Confucianism. Due to its breadth, a precise definition is likely impossible, but a general definition with an accompanying explanation should suffice. Early on, I recommended that Confucian ritual be understood as the prescriptions for those practices and standards in a community that embody (i.e., give form to) expressions of respect and related dispositions. In this section, I provide textual support for the claim that ritual is bound up with respect (*jing*, 敬), looking in particular at excerpts from the *Analects*,

*Mengzi*, and *Xunzi* that either directly or indirectly associate respect with ritual. I then detail the specifics of respect in the Confucian tradition, drawing upon the account of respect given by Sin-yee Chan, wherein respect is construed as a matter of acknowledging, taking seriously, and responding accordingly to a person's worth. This understanding, I argue, connects respect to a number of additional attitudes, such as deference, kindness, and generosity, all of which can be expressed by ritual.

The idea that ritual is intimately tied to respect can be found in many passages from the major pre-Qin Confucians. In the *Analects*, several passages imply that ritual involves expressing and/or cultivating respect. Here are a few examples:

“Performing ritual but not being respectful . . . How should I regard such practices!?” (3.26/7/1)

“If their superiors love ritual, then the people will not dare to be without respect.” (13.4/34/7)

“The gentleman is respectful and not neglectful, giving others respect and observing ritual.” (12.5/31/6)

A quick sinological point is worth making: the second occurrence of “respect” in the third excerpt cited uses a different character than *jing*. The term *gong* (恭) is arguably synonymous with *jing* in the context of pre-Qin Confucianism.<sup>93</sup> Accordingly, I treat them equivalently in the English. Since *jing* is the more prevalent term in the Confucian corpus, however, it will be the term to which I refer in this section unless otherwise noted.

The examples from the *Analects* imply at least a rough connection between respect and ritual. Even more direct connections can be found in *Mengzi* and *Xunzi*. *Mengzi* remarks that one who abides by ritual “respects others” (*Mengzi* 8.28/43/32-8.28/44/1). In

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<sup>93</sup> Here, I follow Sin-yee Chan (2006, 248), who is in turn following Wing-tsit Chan (1969, 785).

a different passage, Mengzi specifically states that ritual is rooted in respect, calling respect the “start” of ritual (11.6/58/22). Finally, Xunzi also states that “to be reverent and respectful makes for ritual propriety” (*Xunzi* 13/65/22). Taken together, such passages provide a strong case for the understanding that ritual conveys respect.

Since ritual and respect are connected, it will be useful to examine what respect entails in the Confucian tradition. This subject has been previously discussed by Sin-yee Chan (2006), according to whom the Confucian notion of respect is built around dispositions of acknowledging, taking seriously, and responding accordingly to a person’s (moral) worth and the (moral) worth of their projects (229). As evidence, Chan draws upon several passages in the *Analects*, *Mengzi*, and *Xunzi* that appear to employ respect in this manner. A key example that Chan cites comes from the *Analects*:

The Master said: “What is You’s lute doing in my doorway?” The other [disciples] began to not respect Zilu (You). The Master said: “You has ascended to the hall, even though he has not entered the room.” (*Analects* 11.15/27/21-2)

Zilu’s carelessness with his lute is considered a breach of propriety. According to Chan, this error, coupled with Confucius’s remark, leads to a devaluation of Zilu’s worth by his peers: the disrespect here is akin to taking someone less seriously and showing them less appreciation; Confucius’s second remark is intended to restore the respect that Zilu lost due to the first remark (233). Additional remarks to support this understanding of respect can be found in passages such as Confucius’s remark in the *Analects* regarding valuation in longstanding friendships (5.17/10/21), as well as a remark in the *Mengzi* that describes the principle of the relationship between ruler and minister as one of respect (4.2/19/98). In these passages, it is implicit that the relationships are ones in which the parties should demonstrate sincere acknowledgement of one another’s worth as is appropriate to one’s

station, and that this disposition of acknowledgement is what forms the core of respect.

As Chan notes, many of the relationships discussed by the Confucians are hierarchical, so shows of respect will be based partially upon how one ranks in comparison to others (232). This will, in turn, require additional, relationship-specific attitudes to help convey the aforementioned acknowledgement of worth. In the ruler-minister relationship, for example, the two parties are not social equals: the minister is subservient to the ruler, and so the minister displays respect by showing deference to the ruler. Indeed, Mengzi himself at one point bases ritual in “deference and yielding” (e.g., as when deferring to one’s supervisor’s judgment) (*Mengzi* 3.6/18/9). In respecting the ruler, the minister is supposed to adopt a related, deferential attitude. It does not seem to be the case, however, that the ruler needs to defer to the minister. Presumably, though, the ruler also owes the minister respect. Xunzi, for example, insists that “there is to be respect for one and all” (*Xunzi* 13/65/18). If respect is merely a matter of deference, then this remark makes little sense for hierarchical relationships; other attitudes are also necessary.

There are a number of possible attitudes that one might utilize toward this end. As Chan notes, loving and caring for others are still aspects of ritual practice and for showing and embodying respect as well (229). There is textual support for this point. In addition to his general remarks about respectfulness and ritual, Xunzi offers the following expansion:

As for “proper conduct,” it means conducting ritual. As for ritual, through it those who are noble are treated with respect. Through it those who are elderly are treated with filiality. Through it those who are senior are treated with fraternal respect. Through it those who are young are treated with kindness. Through it those who are lowly are treated with generosity. (*Xunzi* 27/127/15)

According to Xunzi, abiding by ritual entails respect (*jing*) alongside several other

attitudes, including filiality (*xiao*, 孝), fraternal respect (*ti*, 悌),<sup>94</sup> kindness (*ci*, 慈), and generosity (*hui*, 惠). These dispositions are, I claim, related to respect as it is understood in Confucianism. Several things can be said in defense of this point. To begin, the first three dispositions in the list arguably fit with the aforementioned attitudes of deference and yielding, and the dispositions of kindness and generosity harken to Chan's notion of caring for others. Assuming that Chan is correct about respect's requiring love and care for others, there is reason to associate these notions with respect.

It is also possible, if not probable, that Xunzi's list of ritually expressed attitudes is organized around a particular theme, in this case respect. In many languages, classical Chinese included, words have synonyms that may be used interchangeably (e.g., *jing* and *gong*), as well as terms that might exemplify a particular aspect or form of said word. When we speak of respect in English, for example, we might also speak of reverence, honor, veneration, esteem, or regard.<sup>95</sup> So too is this the case with appeals to respect in Confucianism.<sup>96</sup> Although each of these terms has its own distinctive meaning, we accept that they are related to, if not sometimes synonymous with, our notion of respect. So, too, is it the case with Xunzi's list: to practice ritual is to show respect toward others, and this respect is exemplified differently based upon the relationship. Those who are noble are due respect in a reverential manner. Those who are elder to oneself should be respected with

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<sup>94</sup> This particular character is difficult to explain without using the word "respect" itself, and "fraternity" alone does not suffice. The character refers to the disposition one should hold when engaging with those elder than oneself in general, but appears to be based off of the idea that one should have an affectionate, if deferential, attitude toward an older sibling. In the vernacular, we might think of it as being akin to the attitude of "looking up to" one's elder sibling(s).

<sup>95</sup> "Reverence," in fact, is also a common alternative translation for *jing*.

<sup>96</sup> Chan cites the examples of "honor" and "esteem" (233).

the duty and affection that a child offers to a parent. Those who are of senior rank should be respected as one esteems an elder sibling, while those who are junior should be respected with the regard that older siblings give to their younger siblings. Finally, those who are of low status should be respected by charitable displays. Such an arrangement with regard to ritual suggests that Xunzi, and likely the other Confucians, all regard such dispositions as relating to a common theme, for which respect is a plausible candidate.

This interpretation of ritual's ties to respect and related attitudes is further supported by the manner in which Xunzi discusses the nature of mourning. Several passages indicate that Xunzi regards feelings of respect and love for others to be given form through ritual:

[The] purpose of the funeral rites is none other than to make clear what is *yi* with regard to the living and the dead, to send people off with sorrow and respect, and to put them to rest in a final and comprehensive manner. And so, at the interment, one respectfully buries their bodies. At the sacrifices, one respectfully serves their spirits. With inscriptions, eulogies, records, and genealogies, one respectfully passes along their names. (*Xunzi* 19/95/17-8)

The sacrificial rites are the refined expression of remembrance and longing. To be moved and feel upset are things that cannot but come upon one at times. And so, on occasions when people are happy and join together harmoniously, then a loyal minister or filial son will also be moved and such feelings will come to him. When the feelings that come to him stir him greatly, but simply play themselves out and stop, then with regard to the refined expression of remembrance he feels anguished and unsatisfied, and his practice of ritual and proper regulation would be lacking and incomplete. And so, the former kings accordingly established a proper form for the situation, and thereby what is *yi* in venerating those who are esteemed and loving those who are intimate was set. Thus I say: The sacrificial rites are the refined expression of remembrance and longing. They are the utmost in loyalty, trustworthiness, love, and respect. (19/97/20-19/98/3)

How full of respect! One serves the dead as if serving the living, and one serves the departed as if serving a surviving person. One gives a shape to that which is without physical substance and magnificently accomplishes proper form. (*Xunzi* 19/98/9-10)

The expressions of loving and respectful attitudes are themselves informed and formalized

in the ritual. When mourning a deceased parent, a profound feeling of loss (perhaps akin to heartbreak) induces the target behavior of grieving, which is in turn accommodated by ritual. Such grief shows a recognition and valuation of one's relationship to the deceased, indicating the link between respect and these other attitudes at play in the ritual.

Having said all of this, one might wonder whether the Confucians have rituals unrelated to respect or the other attitudes discussed here. I do not want to rule out the possibility of such rituals, but it seems unlikely given the manner in which the Confucians seem to have viewed the social world: the sorts of interactions covered by ritual, if they are to be harmonious, must be approached with at least a basic level of respect, congeniality, kindness, generosity, and/or general humaneness between the parties involved. This being the case, it is probable (if not certain) that all such interactions will necessarily attend to the sharing of these attitudes between humans in one or more of the various forms discussed here. Thus, given the centrality of ritual to the Confucian socioethical project and the relationship between ritual and respect and other related attitudes, the most plausible view to adopt is one in which we construe rituals as being those practices and divisions that are essential to a community or culture and in some way embody such dispositions.

### 3.5 Conclusion

I have suggested that Confucian ritual be understood as a set of prescriptions rather than strictly as performances, and that these prescriptions govern those practices and social divisions that are intended to embody and express respect and related dispositions. Given that these prescriptions are products of a longstanding tradition, ritual can also be construed as an artifact of culture, one that is specifically employed for a prosocial, promoral purpose. Recall that the Vygotskian approach discussed in the preceding chapter suggests that

psychosocial development in general is a social process insofar as it is *interactive* in the sense that the learner is constantly internalizing and deploying ways of thinking and behaving that are first experienced via socialization with other human beings. This process is mediated through sociocultural artifacts or tools (such as language) that are incorporated into and help to structure a learner's cognitive architecture. In the next chapter, I will argue that the Confucians employ an understanding similar to that of Vygotsky in the context of moral development, with ritual functioning as the core tool for moral inculcation.



## CHAPTER 4

### CONFUCIAN RITUAL, FUNCTIONALITY

Having established a definition of ritual in the Confucian context, it is now possible to discuss ritual's role in the inculcation of promoral dispositions. Specifically, ritual enables individuals to organize, understand, and cope with their own attitudes and other affective states. Using the Confucian ideal of intrapersonal harmony as a focal point, I argue that ritual is regarded by the Confucians as a sociocultural tool intended to bring about a promoral psychology. At least one Confucian, Xunzi, explicitly conceives of ritual study and practice as a means of restructuring a learner's moral psychology in much the same way that Vygotsky suggests that tools such as language modify a learner's cognitive architecture in cognitive development. As a result, the Confucian notion of ritual in moral education should be compatible with the general account of learning offered by Vygotsky.

#### 4.1 Is Xunzi's position on learning really akin to Vygotsky's?

The use of Vygotsky is helpful in providing an account of how we might understand Confucian ritual education from a contemporary perspective. It is, however, insufficient to demonstrate that we should draw upon the Confucian ritual model of moral education itself. If Vygotsky's account of learning and development is accurate (or at least overwhelmingly useful), then we would want to be able to provide a Vygotskian interpretation for almost any viable model of moral education. What needs to be shown is that the Confucians themselves conceived of the ritual education process as involving the same kind of

cognitive restructuring that Vygotsky perceived sociocultural tools such as language to be performing. To this end, I argue that the Confucian theory of moral development (at least as given by Xunzi) is the same as (or at least relevantly similar to) the Vygotskian model of learning and development. Specifically, I will focus on the course that Vygotsky suggests human development takes and show how it maps onto Xunzi's account of developing moral competence via ritual education.

Recall that Vygotsky perceives humans as beginning their development from a position of almost complete ignorance, having only very basic capacities that (unassisted) yield limited potential for cognitive growth. It is only when one is exposed to certain sociocultural tools and experiences that one receives the means to develop these limited capacities further and generate complex cognitive and metacognitive capacities. This development comes from the internalization and repeated use of said tools, a process augmented by the presence of more knowledgeable others in one's environment, which results in a restructuring of how the learner thinks about and approaches information and the world in general. Over time, this process of practice and refinement leads to competency, which in turn expands the learner's previously limited growth potential.

This is a very basic sketch of what is occurring in learning and development on the Vygotskian account, especially with regard to the nature of the psychological restructuring that occurs, so it will be helpful to explain a few key points in greater detail. First, the restructuring that Vygotsky has in mind is transformative: the developmental process involves a fundamental change in the learner's cognitive architecture, both in the sense of the physical brain structure and also in terms of the way the learner thinks and behaves. In particular, learning results in development from an unsophisticated baseline (e.g., thought

*prior to* language exposure and acquisition) to increasingly complex levels (e.g., thought *after* language exposure and acquisition).

One of Vygotsky's examples of such transformation is the development of scientific concepts among children: prior to a certain degree of development and exposure to scientific methodology (or, for that matter, any systemic way of approaching and understanding the world), children are capable of forming only spontaneous concepts. Spontaneous concepts are those that form automatically and without participation in social practices (e.g., concepts from sense perception alone). Concept formation of this sort is a baseline capacity. Scientific concept formation, on the other hand, is more sophisticated; it requires formal instruction so that learners can obtain a system by which to generate more complex concepts. Commenting on Piaget's research on children, Vygotsky (1986) writes:

It should be shown that all the peculiarities of the child's thought described by Piaget (such as syncretism, juxtaposition, and insensitivity to contradiction) stem from the absence of a system in the child's spontaneous concepts — a consequence of undeveloped relations of generality. For example, to be disturbed by a contradiction, the child would have to view the contradictory statements in the light of some general principle, i.e., within a system. But when a child in Piaget's experiments says of one object that it dissolved in water because it was small, and of another . . . because it was big, he merely makes empirical statements of facts that follow the logic of perceptions. No generalization of the kind "Smallness leads to dissolution" is present in his mind, and hence the two statements are not felt to be contradictory. It is this lack of distance from the immediate experience . . . that accounts for the peculiarities of the child's thought. Therefore, these peculiarities do not appear in the child's scientific concepts, which from their very inception carry within them relations of generality, i.e., some rudiments of a system. The formal discipline of scientific concepts gradually transforms the structure of the child's spontaneous concepts and helps organize them into a system: this furthers the child's ascent to higher developmental levels. (205-6)

There are two important points to draw from this excerpt. First, and as noted in the first chapter, development is largely (if not entirely) driven by learning, which Vygotsky treats

a social practice.<sup>97</sup> The development of the ability to utilize scientific concepts requires learners to advance beyond their baseline of spontaneous concept formation, and this advancement requires instruction in scientific methodology so as to provide learners with the aforementioned system. I will return to this point briefly.

The second takeaway is that the “going beyond the baseline” involved in the developmental process is not merely additive or eliminative with regard to spontaneous concepts, but involves their (re)organization for the purpose of producing the complex scientific concepts. As Vygotsky emphasizes, it is the *absence* of a system for thinking that limits children to their spontaneous concepts, and the *presence* of a system that enables their developmental ascent. Once this system integrates into their psychological repertoire, learners can develop increasingly complex conceptualizations based in and around the system. This is the nature of the psychosocial transformation that Vygotsky envisions.

There is more that can be said to flesh out this picture. Recall that Vygotsky sees development as occurring on two levels, the social and the internal. Cognitive and sociocultural processes, such as language use, are encountered first on the social level and then appear on the internal. As described by Penuel and Wertsch (1995):

Sociocultural processes on the one hand and individual functioning on the other [exist] in a dynamic, irreducible tension rather than a static notion of social determination. [Vygotsky’s] approach...considers these poles of sociocultural processes and individual functioning as interacting moments in human action, rather than as static processes that exist in isolation from one another. (84, modified)

For Vygotsky, development occurs when there is an overlap between the two levels, where the learner accesses the sociocultural processes, internalizes them, and then deploys them.

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<sup>97</sup> This contrasts with a nativist view in which development/biology drives learning.

The outcome is that the learner's cognitive architecture is genuinely transformed by this process of appropriation and internalization, as the brain adopts, adapts, and alters the way in which it functions to facilitate and utilize these new tools.

This leads to a second point about restructuring: it is representational. According to John-Steiner and Mahn (1996), for Vygotsky, internalization of knowledge acquired socially is mediated by sociocultural tools (193). These tools, including language, are *appropriated* by the learner and then used to facilitate internalization (and in turn transformation). The tools do this by helping to represent and mediate information taken in from one's social environs. John-Steiner and Mahn describe internalization as follows:

Internalization is conceived of as a representational activity, a process that occurs simultaneously in social practice and in the human brain/mind. Sociocultural researchers include the learners' appropriation of socially elaborated symbol systems as a critical aspect of learning-driven development. This appropriation of symbol systems was a central focus of Vygotsky's work, particularly as applied to educational pedagogy, and led to his most fully elaborated application of the concept of internalization — the transformation of communicative language into inner speech and further into verbal thinking. (196)

The transformative restructuring process is thus one that influences the way the learner interfaces with the world on a general level. As Vygotsky himself describes this transformation, "Speech does not merely serve as an expression of developed thought. Thought is restructured as it is transformed into speech" (Vygotsky 1997, 251). Acquisition of social tools and internalization fundamentally alter the way in which the learner processes, manipulates, and responds to information in his or her environment. This also enables the learner to broaden his or her developmental potential, as internalization and mastery of new knowledge further expands the ability to internalize additional and more complex knowledge, thus improving one's degree of competency.

The question now is whether there is any evidence to suggest that the Confucians held a similarly transformative theory of cognitive development. Due to the nature and context of their writing, we have little in the way of direct discussion of cognitive development in ancient Confucian thought. What we do have, however, are discussions regarding the nature of learning itself (especially moral learning), and it is learning that drives complex development in the Vygotskian picture. Furthermore, when this learning is discussed, it is often described as being part of a greater transformative process of cultivation. Accordingly, a good place to begin our comparison between the Vygotskian account of learning and development and the Confucian approach to moral education will be looking at remarks upon moral learning.

There are a number of passages, particularly in the *Xunzi*, that are very telling with regard to this issue. For example:

And so if you never climb a high mountain, you will not know the height of Heaven. If you never visit a deep ravine, you will not know the depth of the Earth. If you never hear the words passed down from the former kings, you will not know the magnificence of learning. The children of the Han, Yue, Yi, and Mo peoples all cry with the same sound at birth, but when grown they have different customs, because teaching makes them thus . . . No spirit-like state is greater than having transformed oneself with the Way. (*Xunzi* 1/1/7-9)<sup>98</sup>

Two points of similarity between Xunzi and Vygotsky are clear here. First, moral development is a transformative process rooted in social learning (e.g., customs, rituals, and other classic texts). Second, Xunzi treats moral development as being similar to language acquisition (insofar as language is included among the customs one learns), a comparison we have seen in Tappan's analysis of Vygotsky's work. Over the next several

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<sup>98</sup> Hutton (2014) translation, modified.

sections, I will argue that additional textual evidence supports the claim that Xunzi's theory of moral development is roughly the same as Vygotsky's general theory of learning and development. This stems from Xunzi's position that humans are born morally incompetent, must acquire the means to become morally capable and, in the process, undergo substantial transformation. The nature of the moral transformation in Xunzi's writings, including how it is brought about (i.e., via a sociocultural tool), includes a form of the cognitive restructuring needed for development in Vygotsky's picture. Thus, despite lacking the sophistication and nuance of modern cognitive science, Xunzi communicates a theory of moral development roughly equivalent to the Vygotskian account of general cognitive development. A good place to begin this comparison is with a very telling example of moral development in the *Xunzi*, namely the process of producing intrapersonal harmony.

#### 4.2 Developing (moral) competency

That ritual is intended to promote and maintain harmony between members of a community is uncontroversial among scholars of Confucianism; as indicated in the third chapter, a clear purpose of ritual is to help clarify and instantiate various social roles and obligations (e.g., bowing to a superior or wearing particular clothing to express a position). Less explored is the notion of how ritual is intended to facilitate *intrapersonal* harmony (i.e., harmony within one's person) and how this pursuit contributes to the overall development of promoral dispositions.

This is not to suggest that there is *no* relevant scholarship on this topic: Hagop Sarkissian (2010) and Deborah Mower (2011) have both drawn upon the role that ritual plays in guiding behavior as a means of responding to situationist challenges to virtue ethics (e.g., Doris 2002; Harman 2000) by suggesting that Confucian attention to ritual

indicates an awareness that situations are composites of both agents' psychological make-up *as well as* circumstances outside of an agent's control. In another recent project, Seligman et al. (2008) suggest that ritual be understood as an attempt to reconcile an "imperfect" real world with the morally ideal world by establishing imaginative "as if" scenarios, using Confucianism as a prime example: ritual practice is intended to bridge the gap between the real and the ideal by providing a framework for personal flourishing despite constant imperfection. This is a position that finds support in the work of Mark Berkson (2014), who emphasizes that the Confucian (or at least Xunzi's) project with ritual is to acknowledge its symbolic significance in interacting and coping with a highly complex world. In most of the aforementioned projects, however, the *primary* focus of discussion tends to be upon the role that ritual plays in achieving harmony among members of a community.<sup>99</sup> This is unsurprising: Confucianism is largely concerned with sociopolitical wellbeing, and a good number of Confucian passages address appropriate behaviors in relationships and guidelines for rulers.

Without diminishing the importance of the interpersonal project, I want to turn our attention to a less explored, but arguably equally important, project in Confucianism: the pursuit of intrapersonal harmony. I say that this project is equally important to the Confucians for two reasons: first, and practically, one would expect any philosophy that intends to bring about harmony for the whole to bring about harmony for the constituent parts as well (assuming, of course, that there are parts distinguishable from a whole).<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> I emphasize that it is the primary but not sole focus of these texts. All of the named authors do at some level tend to the matter of intrapersonal harmony; elaborating upon it is simply not the main objective.

<sup>100</sup> This is, at least, how such philosophies traditionally proceed. To clarify, I am not arguing here that philosophies aimed at communal harmony *must* include features addressing harmony of the individuals therein. One could, for example, devise a social system in which communal harmony (or order) is facilitated by forcing people to adopt particular social roles by means of coercion and/or extrinsic rewards. Han Feizi,



Such was a project of both Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, as the individual's wellbeing was treated (at least in part) as being a necessary constituent of the state's wellbeing and, as such, was a practical and reasonable undertaking.<sup>101</sup> Without engaging in an additional comparative project, I think it is safe to say that such practical thinking is not unreasonable and that the Confucians probably held at least a similar idea.<sup>102</sup> Second, there is abundant textual evidence to suggest that the pursuit of intrapersonal harmony is treated as an important project in Confucianism, with its most explicit and detailed advocacy coming from the *Xunzi*, where attaining intrapersonal harmony is treated largely as a matter of learning, practicing, and appropriately understanding ritual.

A brief explanation for my focus on Xunzi is in order: of the three major pre-Qin Confucian texts (*Analects*, *Mengzi*, *Xunzi*), I turn to the *Xunzi* not because I take it to be the sole representative of this line of thinking, but the clearest, most systematic, and most explicit. The *Analects* frequently alludes to the multiple significances of ritual, but is comparably sparing in details; more importantly, the text includes no detailed accounts of human psychology, a key feature of Xunzi's writing. The *Mengzi*, on the other hand, *does* provide a rich account of human psychology, and is arguably even compatible with the

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another prominent pre-Qin philosopher, advocates something akin to this system. This is an interesting issue, but one that is separate from my project. All I mean to suggest here is that there is an established tradition of philosophy in which flourishing and harmony are sought on both communal and individual levels.

<sup>101</sup> A similar view on these two texts is taken by John Cooper (1999, 77-78). Indeed, Christine Korsgaard (1999, 2009) even draws upon Plato's notion of goodness stemming from an orderly soul to reinforce her own, Neo-Kantian argument for the idea that reasons have a function of ordering and unifying a rational self, what she refers to as a "constitutional model" of the soul (1999, 1).

<sup>102</sup> Indicators of such thought can be found in several passages from Confucian texts. In *Analects* 12.9/31/28, for example, we read: "If the people are satisfied, then how can the prince not be satisfied? If the people are not satisfied, then how can the ruler be satisfied?"

developmental view discussed in this chapter (at least to a certain extent).<sup>103</sup> Mengzi, however, speaks little of the importance of ritual, focusing largely upon other moral dispositions discussed in Confucianism, and does comparably little in the way of offering a detailed and systematic account of how to go about the moral cultivation process. For these reasons, I focus on Xunzi's account of ritual.

It is worth noting that, over the course of the ritual education process, one acquires and develops promoral dispositions that not only help one to achieve intrapersonal harmony, but also impact one's approach to and interactions with others. In particular, we shall see that the ways in which ritual study and practice help to guide and channel certain features of one's psychology, such as one's sense of approval and coordination of desires along with other affective states, not only benefit one's psychological wellbeing, but also refine and cement those dispositions that are relevant to morally charged interactions with others. Here, we find a conspicuous similarity between the role of ritual in the moral cultivation system devised by the Confucians and Vygotsky's account of language as a useful tool for a developing cognitive architecture: language facilitates communication between others, but also helps to organize and navigate one's own thoughts and experiences (e.g., as with inner speech). Likewise, the Confucians intend ritual to facilitate promoral interactions and also help to organize one's own morally relevant internal states. By doing so, ritual helps one to navigate one's emotions and reflexive attitudes not only with regard to one's intrapersonal affairs, but in interpersonal cases as well. As such, the

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<sup>103</sup> Mengzi famously employs a plant metaphor to describe moral growth. If we assume that Mengzi takes this metaphor seriously, then it is arguable that Mengzi views human moral psychology as starting from a fledgling seed state and, with time and proper nourishment, grows and blossoms into full-fledged morality. Such a reading, however, requires the reader to make certain assumptions about the text that may or may not be warranted. For this and other reasons, I think it better to set Mengzi aside and focus on Xunzi.

intrapersonal function of ritual also has implications for the interpersonal function.

To further explicate Xunzi's position on the role that ritual plays in achieving intrapersonal harmony and how this pursuit facilitates the cultivation of promoral dispositions, however, we need to look not only at Xunzi's discussion of ritual, but also his account of human psychology. By doing so, we can obtain a better understanding of what is (psychologically) occurring in ritual practice (at least from Xunzi's perspective), how this works toward intrapersonal harmony, and how it ultimately contributes to the inculcation of promoral dispositions. Doing so will also help to set the stage for elaborating upon the Vygotskian features inherent in Xunzi's general theory of moral/ritual education. In particular, it will showcase Xunzi's belief that humans, at birth, lack sufficient resources to spontaneously develop moral competency.

#### 4.3 Xunzi's account of human psychology and the necessity of ritual

While lacking the resources of contemporary cognitive scientists, Xunzi nonetheless offers a complex account of human psychology, describing the human psyche as being composed of multiple, sometimes contentious parts:

The various names for aspects of humans: That which is as it is from birth is called *xing* (nature, 性). That produced by the harmony of *xing*, intricately combining feeling and response, that requires no work and is so in and of itself is called *xing*. The *xing*'s feelings of liking and aversion, delight and anger, and sorrow and joy are called *qing* (dispositions, 情). The *qing* being so and the *xin* (heart-mind, 心) making a selection on its behalf is called deliberation. When the *xin* deliberates and one's ability acts on its behalf, this is called *wei* (artifice, 偽). That which arises from accumulated deliberation and practicing one's abilities is also called *wei*. (Xunzi 22/107/22-4)

The three elements, *xing*, *qing*, and *wei*, are parts of the human psycho-physical makeup.<sup>104</sup> The terms are difficult to translate accurately and effectively into English, but I will attempt to do so while providing qualifications for each translation. *Xing* has traditionally been translated into English as “nature” (i.e., as in “human nature”). I will also employ this translation, but it is important to qualify that *xing*/nature refers exclusively to those characteristics and behaviors of a living thing that are purely spontaneous, arising from some inborn disposition (instinct is probably a good example) or spontaneous development, but never from conscious work or effort.<sup>105</sup> In so qualifying the term, I hope to distinguish Xunzi’s use of nature from certain notions of nature prevalent in the Western tradition (e.g., essentialist conceptions of a thing’s “nature”).

*Qing* refers to a thing's constitution: the character of the thing itself, particularly affective states such as feelings that can be actively engaged and may, at least within a range, vary from individual to individual. I opt to translate this term as “disposition” or “dispositions.” This allows us to discuss the relevant character traits and psychological states under a broad banner while still maintaining the meaning of the original character. Furthermore, since the states grouped under *qing*/disposition are contingent upon the natural, physical makeup of a thing, this concept will be inextricably bound-up with *xing*.<sup>106</sup>

Finally, *wei* refers to any undertaking by a person that does not arise purely

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<sup>104</sup> The fourth term, *xin*, refers to the particular organ of the heart, but is construed in ancient Chinese as both the heart and mind. Although the *xin* plays an important role in human functionality, it is the three aforementioned elements with which we will chiefly concern ourselves here.

<sup>105</sup> This interpretation of *xing* is not uncontroversial, but a good case is made for it by Dan Robins (2011). According to Robins, it is “a thing’s *xing* to have some characteristic just in case the thing has the characteristic naturally, and it is a thing’s *xing* to behave in some way only if it behaves that way spontaneously” (32).

<sup>106</sup> Hence, we often find the two treated as a compound in Xunzi’s writing.

spontaneously from the nature and/or disposition. For these reasons, I translate the term as “artifice,” with the qualification that we are juxtaposing seemingly “artificial” actions with seemingly instinctive or spontaneous behaviors.<sup>107</sup> I do this to prevent misunderstandings of artifice as referring to somehow “fake” or “disingenuous” activity, as well as to reinforce its distinctness from the other psychological features discussed by Xunzi.

All three aspects are relevant to both the purpose and practice of ritual, and in turn moral development and intrapersonal harmony, albeit in different ways and to different extents. Remarking upon the origin of ritual, Xunzi writes that humans are born with desires that require (orderly) fulfillment, and that this is one reason for the establishment of ritual (i.e., to ensure such orderly fulfillment) (*Xunzi* 19/90/3-5). Desires (*yu*, 欲) are products of the compound of a thing’s nature and disposition, and are perhaps best understood here as realized affective states (e.g., one’s likes). It is important to clarify that these sorts of desires are those brute, spontaneous desires that arise from one’s human (and perhaps even animal) disposition (e.g., desire for food, sex, etc.). According to Xunzi, these desires are simply part of the human make-up: they are inalienable and, therefore, things with which any realistic theory of moral psychology must contend. This is especially significant because, if left unchecked or unguided, these desires may lead to contention and strife within the populace, as people go about seeking their fulfillment without constraint. Since such scenarios are caused (in some sense) by disposition and nature, we might think of the development and implementation of ritual as a response to these elements of humans.

The development and implementation of ritual, in contrast, is a matter of artifice.

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<sup>107</sup> I also note that the view I take of Xunzi’s project is similar to the interpretation Robins (2001) adopts. Although Robins’s intention differs from my own, I do not view our readings as wholly incompatible.

As Xunzi notes, “All ritual and *yi* are produced by the artifice of the sages; they are not produced by humans' nature” (*Xunzi* 23/114/8-9). Ritual, according to Xunzi, was a product of the effort of the sages that extended beyond the spontaneity of their nature. Learning, practicing, and understanding ritual is also artifice, as it requires activity beyond one's innate, spontaneous tendencies.<sup>108</sup> We might say, then, that disposition and nature make it necessary to instantiate ritual, while artifice enables instantiation.<sup>109</sup>

While this formulation is accurate in some ways, we should be careful how we proceed. First, it is not yet clear how precisely artifice differs so significantly from nature and disposition that it enables the production and pursuit of ritual. Second, Xunzi's project is not to suggest that artifice should rule over nature and disposition;<sup>110</sup> rather, the *xin* is simply treated as the overall control center of the human being.<sup>111</sup> Fortunately, we can navigate both of these concerns by elaborating a bit more upon the nature of artifice and its contributions to ritual.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> This is not to suggest that practicing ritual must lack spontaneity; the Confucian tradition in fact suggests that morally ideal persons will accord with ritual as if spontaneously. There is a difference, however, between behaviors that arise spontaneously from *xing* (that are “just there”) and behaviors that spontaneously follow from *wei* (that are in some way “created”). Ritual practice is of the latter sort, and only after *much* practice. Edward Slingerland (2003, 2014) makes similar points about spontaneity in the Confucian tradition.

<sup>109</sup> To clarify: I am focusing primarily upon the role of ritual with regard to satisfying desires and other affective states in terms of their satisfaction via expression, as in the case of utilizing mourning rituals to deal with one's grief. An additional role of rituals that I do not focus upon here is the role they play in Xunzi's theory of resource management. Although I do take this to be a function of ritual in Xunzi's theory, I do not take it to be the primary function, nor is it the one upon which this project focuses.

<sup>110</sup> A contrast is Plato's ideal of the rational part of the soul ruling the appetitive and spirited parts.

<sup>111</sup> See, for example, *Xunzi* 21/104/10-12: “The *xin* is lord of the body and master of spirit and intelligence. It gives orders, but it does not take orders. It restrains itself, orders itself, releases itself, takes itself, moves itself, and halts itself. Thus, the mouth can be coerced to be silent or to speak; the body can be coerced to bend or extend; the *xin* cannot be coerced to change its thoughts.”

<sup>112</sup> One might object that the distinction between the “natural” (i.e., *xing* and *qing*) and artificial (*wei*) is overly clean in Xunzi's picture: surely if it is possible to craft rituals capable of both bringing about order *and* satisfying inborn desires, there must be a sense in which the abilities to construct and follow rituals are also natural, else the rituals would not “stick” as they do. This is an interesting point, but one that Xunzi

As aspects of a human being, nature and disposition should be nourished and cared for, and artifice also requires attention and concern.<sup>113</sup> This is because the desires of nature and disposition are not the sole sources of motivating forces; artifice also motivates. Xunzi points to human thought, particularly a sense of approval (*ke*, 可) or disapproval (*buke*, 不可), as a means of motivating and directing behavior. Xunzi states: “All humans follow what they approve and turn away from that which they do not approve” (*Xunzi* 22/111/20). “Approval” here is a different notion than merely “liking” or “desiring”; it seems to apply to a sophisticated sense akin to deeming an action or the object of an action “permissible” or “appropriate.” In an earlier passage, Xunzi writes:

Life is what humans most desire; death is that to which humans are most averse. Yet there are cases of humans letting go of life and completing their own deaths. This is not because of a lack of desire to live and a desire to die, but because they disapprove of living thusly and approve dying thusly. Thus, when desires are excessive but one does not act, it is because the *xin* halts the action. (*Xunzi* 22/111/8-9)<sup>114</sup>

When Xunzi discusses humans disapproving of living but approving of dying, the claim is that the humans in question are unable to deem their living or way of living permissible, while they deem their deaths permissible, even appropriate.

The interesting point here is that Xunzi directs us to a capacity of the *xin*, namely an attitude of approval and disapproval that overrules brute desires and that is a check on our impulses. The *xin* may choose a course of action according to feelings such as the

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himself never addresses (short of suggesting that the rituals work partially because they satisfy features of human nature such as desires). Accordingly, I will also forego further discussion of the point.

<sup>113</sup> The Confucians and many other classical Chinese thinkers take it as granted that those features of humans that are innate to them should be valued and treated as worthy of care (e.g., one’s body). As Berkson (2014) notes, there is no ascetic wing of pre-Qin Confucianism

<sup>114</sup> A similar passage appears in the *Mengzi* (11.10/59/25-30) with a discussion about how humans will give up their own lives for the sake of what they feel is right (*yì*, 義).

desires *and* the attitudes of approval and disapproval. If Xunzi's account is correct, then the *xin* will select in favor of what one approves. Thus, humans *do* possess a capacity to overrule their desires in favor of some greater feeling of whether or not to approve some action, but this capacity must be drawn out and developed. As a capacity of *xin*, this sense may be thought of as a part of artifice, per Xunzi's definition. One plausible interpretation of the origin of ritual, then, is that the sage kings' artifice was particularly brilliant, specifically with regard to their sense of approval. Due to this trait, they were able to establish rituals that would be effective for all. For one who is not a sage, however, this capacity is typically less refined (if it is refined at all): there is no guarantee that what one deliberates in favor of will align with what is acceptably moral, especially not at birth; simply having a sense of approval and disapproval does not guarantee reliable moral performance (or even moral performance at all).<sup>115</sup>

Note that this also demonstrates one of the aforementioned points of overlap between Xunzi and Vygotsky: on both theories, the beginning of psychosocial development is a position of complete (or near complete) incompetence, where the learner's baseline capacities for developing and deploying knowledge and skills are still minimal (if at all extant). This description might seem intuitive: many accounts of learning will start from the assumption that learners begin in ignorance. What is significant about the notion of incompetence I am describing here is that the ability to move beyond it is completely contingent upon social factors (i.e., being exposed to the proper tools and

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<sup>115</sup> This probably accounts at least partially for Xunzi's belief that humans are not born sufficiently moral. See Xunzi's treatise "*Xing* is Bad."



experiences via which one then develops the target capacities).<sup>116</sup> This position contrasts with views like the nativist ones discussed in the first chapter. Moral nativists, recall, assert that (normal) humans are born with some sort of promoral capacity that innately matures over the course of a developmental window; biology drives the developmental process, not social learning. I have given a series of reasons to be skeptical of strong (and even middle-ground) moral nativism, and suggested that weak nativism struggles to distinguish itself from social learning theories such as Vygotsky's and, by comparison, Xunzi's.

Accordingly, one needs sociomoral training so that one can reliably judge whether or not an action is appropriate or inappropriate; that is to say, social learning helps to fashion the sense of *ke-buke* into a distinctly promoral capacity. Consider the example of a hungry person who, finding a loaf of bread, deems it appropriate to eat the bread regardless of other factors such as whether someone else might have been saving it to eat, or if someone else might have an even greater hunger and need for the bread. These factors would not necessarily affect the judgment of one whose sense of appropriate and inappropriate has never undergone any sort of moral education. Sages might have a sufficient capacity for sympathy and awareness of others to make such judgments, but many others might not. As a result, the judgments of those who are not (yet) sages will be more strongly influenced by their desires.

This is related to a matter that Mengzi addresses with regard to whether it is permissible to deviate from ritual for the sake of sating a brute desire:

If by twisting your elder brother's arm and snatching his food you can obtain food, but if you do not twist [his arm] then you cannot obtain food,

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<sup>116</sup> This, of course, raises a puzzle for the Xunzian (and by association Vygotskian) accounts: If morality is based off of social factors, then from whence did morality originally arise? I will not engage this question, but it is worth noting.

will you twist his arm? If by crossing over your neighbor's wall and dragging away his daughter you can obtain a wife, but if you do not drag [her away] then you cannot obtain a wife, will you drag her away?  
(*Mengzi* 12.1/62/5-7)

For Mengzi, feelings of fraternity among siblings come about naturally, as does a basic level of respect to others.<sup>117</sup> At the same time, so too do base desires, such as for eating and sex. The implication is that, when faced with circumstances such as those described, one will fall into an internal conflict if one acts on brute desires that force one to go against other standards or feelings that one might value, such as honoring one's older brother. This again appeals to the idea that humans tend not to go against what they deem impermissible, but also raises the question of how that sense of permissibility is guided. How is a person to make sense of his or her conflicting feelings and desires in light of varying socio-ethical scenarios? Without some standard by which to parse such scenarios, similar to the manner in which language is used to organize and assess experience in general, there is no guarantee that an agent will behave in a consistent (and morally appropriate) manner.<sup>118</sup>

As with the Vygotskian model requiring learners turn to particular tools and more knowledgeable others for the development of cognitive capacities, what is needed on Xunzi's picture is a guide for the development and execution of moral deliberation. The manner in which this deliberation occurs can be modified and conditioned by moral training, and without such conditioning, it is likely that both consistency and the ability to

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<sup>117</sup> Xunzi, of course, is skeptical of such well-formed capacities being part of one's innate psychology. Nonetheless, Xunzi does share the position that certain combinations of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors can produce not only social, but also psychological conflicts.

<sup>118</sup> For clarity: when I say language helps in organizing and assessing experiences, I am not claiming anything controversial such as "thought is language" or that the fundamental units of thought, if thought has units, are words. Rather, I am simply referring to what I take to be the relatively uncontroversial view across modern psychology that language plays some significant role in how we analyze and approach the world.

process a moral situation will be impoverished. There must be a more objective standard available to everyone, regardless of the degree of compassion one is born with. This is where the turn to ritual occurs.

#### 4.4 Ritual as a harmonizer of inner states

Xunzi identifies the following difficulty that any moral theory must resolve: it must provide an ethic that simultaneously attends to our (sometimes turbulent) affective states and also transforms individuals into reliable moral performers. For Xunzi, the first issue is framed in terms of the aforementioned desires and dispositions; the second is framed as a matter of developing a capacity to gauge appropriateness and act accordingly. This transformative-developmental approach, we will see, is akin to the cognitive restructuring characteristic of Vygotsky's model. Given Xunzi's belief that morality is something that humans lack from birth and must be taught, and given his deep interest in the psychological makeup of humans, it is unsurprising that Xunzi's conception of ritual's functionality is that it effectively restructures or builds upon the extant psychology to canalize new dispositions for how to act and feel in the highly social context of human living.

Returning to the example of establishing intrapersonal harmony in light of contentious desires and affective states, Xunzi's solution to balancing the two sides of the problem is ritual. As articulated in my third chapter, ritual is a set of prescriptions governing respectful practices and standards. In prescribing such practices and standards, ritual is intended as a means to social order, part of which concerns resource-allocation (e.g., distribution of food, land, powers, etc.). In this respect, among those things for which ritual provides are the natural desires that we have simply in virtue of being human.

This may at first appear to be a superficial means of employing ritual to aid in one's

psychological wellbeing, and to have very little to do with helping humans achieve intrapersonal harmony: harmony implies that one thing is being balanced with (at least) one other thing such that they can co-function effectively, perhaps even in a manner that is aesthetically pleasing. Mere desire *satisfaction* does not necessarily imply desire *harmonization*, let alone the harmonization of other internal states. Upon further consideration of Xunzi's account of the origin of ritual, however, we will find that the project *does* entail an ideal of internal harmonization. In particular, recall that Xunzi regards sacrificial rites as involving feelings of "remembrance and longing," permitting practitioners to cope with grief and to show love and respect for those who have been lost.<sup>119</sup> Xunzi's belief is that, in addition to providing people with a means of harmoniously interacting with others and satisfying their material needs, ritual provides a profound means of fulfilling feelings of compassion and obligation. The forms dictated by ritual are intended to provide humans with the therapeutic means of grasping such feelings and bringing peace to oneself by channeling these feelings in a constructive (at least on Xunzi's view) manner. Sacrificial rites, wearing mourning attire, a mourner's diet, and other such ritually prescribed practices are all intended not merely as external shows of respect and devotion; they are the means of giving rest to one's feelings.

In what way is this act of coping also an act of balancing/harmonizing? Xunzi suggests that, if unexpressed, our feelings can become turbulent. If our feelings are turbulent, then we would expect them to push and pull us in all directions, thus throwing us off balance. By adhering to ritually prescribed order, however, we are able to structure

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<sup>119</sup> See again *Xunzi* 19/97/20-19/98/1, especially: "The sacrificial rites are the refined expression of remembrance and longing."

the ways in which we respond to and interface with our life experiences in such a manner as to give our feelings proper measure without allowing any of them to overwhelm us. Put simply, the rituals help us to harmonize by giving us means of controlling, expressing, and ordering ourselves. Xunzi writes that

“For his words, the gentleman has a foundation and roof. For his conduct, he has levees and depth markers.” This means that what he requires of people’s ways and virtue goes no lower than security and preservation for people. It means that what he requires of people’s intentions and thoughts goes no lower than becoming a well-bred man. If a person’s model deviates from the later kings, he calls it unrefined. Whether one elevates him or demotes him, belittles him or makes him a minister, he does not go outside these bounds. That is how the gentleman exercises his intentions and thoughts within a foundation, roof, and halls. (*Xunzi* 8/34/20-4)<sup>120</sup>

The “depth markers” to which Xunzi refers are the rituals, and arguably the “foundation, roof, and halls” can also be construed as such.<sup>121</sup> What this metaphor connotes is that what rituals effectively do is provide guidance and place constraints on behavior, thought, and feeling. Harmony is achieved by satisfying one’s feelings within these ritual constraints.

There is an important likeness between this conception of ritual’s function as a collection of constraints/guides and that of sociocultural tools in the Vygotskian transformative account of development. For Vygotsky, the appropriation of tools facilitates the internalization and mastery processes by way of mediation. Just as language may help to develop basic communicative competency by transforming the way the individual thinks and interacts with others, or the manner in which instruction in scientific methodology leads to the ability to form scientific concepts, ritual helps to provide for promoral

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<sup>120</sup> For additional use of the metaphor, see *Xunzi* 10/46/22-10/47/1.

<sup>121</sup> For comparison of depth markers and levees to ritual, see *Xunzi* 17/82/22-17/83/1 and 27/127/4-5. The comparison to “foundation, roof, and halls” is in 19/95/15, where adhering to ritual is described as the gentleman’s “home and palace.” The gentleman is also said to “clothe” himself with ritual in 27/134/8.

psychosocial development by providing direction and placing constraints on behavior, thought, and feeling according to what is morally permissible. It is ritual that constructs these internal “foundations, roofs, and halls” as well as “levees and depth markers.”

An example is illustrative: mourning allows us to engage our grief without permitting it complete control over our actions; it is balanced against the rest of our being by the constraints placed upon it by ritual. In this capacity, Xunzi's prescription of ritual is like many of the activities that therapists recommend for the bereaved.<sup>122</sup> Therapists often direct those in grieving toward constructive, expressive outlets for their feelings, such as music, painting, and writing. That these outlets are specifically externalization and not merely internalization practices is indicative of a human need to engage in expression to cope with feelings in a healthy manner. This also appears to be the gist of some of Xunzi's assertions about ritual and, as such, indicates that there is an overlap between the external, interpersonal and internal, intrapersonal functions of the ritual program in moral education.

Of course, it is limiting to think of ritual as being solely about coping with grief. The burial and sacrificial rites are explicit, well-depicted examples of appeal to extreme feelings, but there is no reason to think of ritual as being concerned only with such feelings. Rather, ritual is concerned with the expression and management of feelings and dispositions in general. When Xunzi is discussing the idealization of ritual enactment, for example, he speaks of feelings broadly rather than in reference to specific states.<sup>123</sup> This

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<sup>122</sup> Again, see Berkson (2014).

<sup>123</sup> See, for example, *Xunzi* 19/92/21-19/93/1: “When cultural refinement and patterning are sophisticated and feelings and implements are scarce, ritual is in its loftiest state. When cultural refinement and patterning are scarce and feeling and implements are sophisticated, ritual is in its lowest state. When cultural refinement and patterning as well as feeling and implements are used together as inside and outside or front and back and, moreover, are mixed together equally, ritual is in the middle state. Thus, the gentleman

suggests that rituals are intended to access, cope with, and utilize all sorts of feelings.

Consider again the case of the burial ritual:

Ordinarily in funeral rites, one gradually alters the corpse's appearance and changes its ornamentation, moves it farther away, and over time returns to peaceful living. (*Xunzi* 19/94/3)

Just as there is a desire to mourn for those one loves, so too is there a desire (or at least a practical need) to return to functional living; just as the ritual provides for grieving, so too does it allot for other practical concerns one holds. The act of distancing oneself from the body of the deceased over time is a symbolic action, reflecting the growing distance between the living and those passed. It is precisely because the ritual actions symbolize this notion that participating in this ritual form aids in helping one to move past the grief of loss. It invites the practitioner to recognize the transition not only of life into death, but also the transition between having a person alive and in one's life and not. The ideal outcome is that the ritual helps the mourner to reorient to and carry on in a world in which his or her loved one no longer lives. It does this by giving a means of mediating between one's innermost feelings and the external, social world: the ritual helps to structure one's thoughts and feelings about death and loss. As such, ritual provides individuals with the means of coping with themselves as well as others and, in so doing, it allows individuals to reconcile and regulate (ideally to the point of harmony) their various states.

Note also that one of ritual's aspects is that it supports humans in their desire-sating behaviors. For Xunzi, "support" does not mean that desires will be sated immediately upon manifesting. Support means to help, and this help can come in the form of attempting to

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at his highest produces ritual in its highest state, at his lowest fulfills its lowest state, and when in the middle he dwells in the intermediate class."

curb behaviors, especially (self-) destructive ones. One reason that the Confucians advocate ritual education is ritual's ability to contribute to intrapersonal harmony insofar as it involves the channeling and refining of feelings to make them appropriate, tolerable, and comprehensible for oneself in various situations. We might say that ritual's function in this sense is that it provides individuals with an internal moral language by which to assess, structure, and organize their feelings.<sup>124</sup> The standards provided by ritual can help to coordinate one's feelings much like how ritual prescriptions provide a standard to coordinate social behavior, giving a vocabulary to parse and contend with desires.

These features of ritual can be further explicated by appeal to the "inner speech" described in Vygotsky's human developmental theory. Recall from the first chapter Vygotsky's claim that language, once internalized and appropriated, transforms not only the manner in which one communicates with others, but the very nature of thought itself by providing a particular structure; it organizes a learner's cognitive architecture.<sup>125</sup> The function of language/inner speech, I suggest, is similar to (if not the same as) the function of ritual in Xunzi's developmental picture.<sup>126</sup> From birth, Xunzi claims, we lack the tools to (harmoniously) cope with and respond to scenarios such as losing a loved one, being without sufficient sustenance, and even general interactions with others. Just as one lacking

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<sup>124</sup> Admittedly, the language metaphor here is a thin one and, as mentioned in Chapter 1, we should be suspicious of just how far language can take us in terms of moral development. The norms of language, such as grammar, are relatively loose in comparison to moral norms. Nonetheless, the comparison is helpful insofar as it illustrates the sense in which ritual, as a tool of moral education, is intended to structure morally relevant thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Furthermore, it is important to stress that, in Xunzi's context, the focus is on *specific* rituals distinctly geared toward the end of harmony, rather than any and all rituals.

<sup>125</sup> A more complete explanation can be found in Vygotsky's text, *Thought and Language* (1986).

<sup>126</sup> To clarify, I am not suggesting that language and ritual are *competitors* in the developmental picture; if anything, they are both important tools for psychosocial development, and that the *nature* of their internalization and application is significantly similar.



language is developmentally inhibited in the Vygotskian scheme, one lacking ritual is morally stunted on Xunzi's view. Ritual provides the means of organizing, coordinating, and even priming our affective responses to these sorts of scenarios. Ritual restructures a learner's psychological landscape by helping to inculcate a collection of responses to and understandings of a variety of ethically charged situations. Thus, just as inner speech helps to organize and coordinate thought in the Vygotskian picture, ritual helps to organize and coordinate attitudes for Xunzi.

We can see from the aforementioned passages that ritual is intended to be not only psychologically tenable, but even helpful to human development. How is this to be done? For Xunzi, this involves employing both the capacity to discern appropriateness and the elements of ritual that help make the Confucian ethic practicable and orderly: similar to the manner in which mastering a verbal language aids in one's analysis of both the world and oneself, training up the capacity to discern appropriate behavior according to ritual helps one become a reliable moral practitioner. This project is a matter of artifice, specifically how it develops and employs the human distinction-drawing capacity (*bian*, 辨).

#### 4.5 Ritual as a means of assessing and regulating the sense of approval

Ritual provides the *xin* with normative standards of judgment which, in turn, affect one's distinction-drawing ability, including the facet of approval and disapproval (*ke-buke*). This is similar to the manner in which linguistic expressions implicitly provide culturally based connotations of approval and disapproval. In other words, learning ritual is (in part) a matter of learning and adopting social norms. By adhering to these cultivated and refined judgments, rather than merely the uneducated baseline sense of approval and disapproval, individuals gain a source of moral guidance and a basis for moral judgment

that is more objective and reliable (or at least consistent) than when uneducated. Ritual, then, provides the norms that are assimilated via moral education into the learner's sense of approval and disapproval.<sup>127</sup> In terms of satisfying and harmonizing desires, one might say that Xunzi's educational program first uses ritual to cultivate and refine the sense of approval and disapproval that enables self- and social-awareness when one is seeking to fulfill desires. When one deliberates whether to fulfill a particular desire, the deliberation is subject to the cultivated sense of approval and disapproval as framed by ritual, just as language often frames reasoning.<sup>128</sup> Establishing this norm throughout an entire community sets a basis for order and overall interpersonal harmony.

Ritual education could, then, help to shape the sense of approval and disapproval, but there is still the remaining issue of the aforementioned desires that Xunzi believes humans are predisposed to seek and act upon. Xunzi claims that a purpose of ritual is to provide a means of satisfying these desires without creating disorder, but how is ritual to sate desires like an urge to harm another? Judgment from an educated sense of approval and disapproval might motivate the angered individual to not perform an act of violence, but the desire to do harm could persist; it does not mean that the individual's desires and judgments are in harmony. It may be the case that learning and abiding by social norms

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<sup>127</sup> See *Xunzi* 4/15/13-17 (Hutton translation): Yao and Yu were not born perfect. They began by changing their original substance and perfected themselves through cultivation. Cultivation is such that one must await its culmination and only then is one complete. By birth, people are originally petty people. Without a teacher or the proper model, they will seek only benefit. By birth, people are originally petty people, and if they meet with a chaotic age and acquire chaotic customs, then this is to add pettiness to pettiness, to get chaos from chaos. If the gentleman does not have power, then he will have no way to get inside them. What do people's mouths and bellies know of ritual and *yi*? What do they know of deference and yielding? What do they know of principled shame and concentrated accumulation of effort? Munching and chomping, the mouth chews. Gurgling and burbling, the belly becomes full. Without a teacher or the proper model, people's hearts are nothing beyond their mouths and bellies.

<sup>128</sup> See again *Xunzi* 22/111/8-9.

can lead to a superficial sort of order, but it is a fragile, tense order as there is the strong possibility of people conforming to norms without truly desiring to conform. How can the individual, and by extension the community, attain harmony when desires continue to conflict with the sense of approval and disapproval? It is necessary to explain how this shaping of the sense of approval and disapproval by learning ritual, and its bearing on judgment, effectively brings harmony to both the individual *and* the community.

Simply eliminating problematic desires is not an option since, as Xunzi has already acknowledged, humans have these desires by virtue of their nature and dispositions.<sup>129</sup> So long as human dispositions are what they are, the corresponding desires will continue to arise and potentially conflict with the sense of approval and disapproval. Dispositions, as Xunzi points out, are the roots of human desires. Being intertwined with one's nature, the dispositions cannot be removed because they are inherently part of being human. If there is no way to eliminate desires or the dispositions from which they arise, what can be done?

Xunzi's solution is transformation. T.C. Kline III (2006) suggests that this process occurs alongside the cultivation of the sense of approval and disapproval that comes with learning ritual. Since one's dispositions originate desires, cultivating these dispositions will could result in refined desires that no longer conflict with the refined sense of approval and disapproval. It is not farfetched to think that this enhanced sense, and the ability to make judgments based upon it, build upon the original dispositions or create new ones (242).<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Consider also that Xunzi rejects that desire-removal should be pursued as a practical project: "Those who say that orderliness must await the elimination of desires . . . lack means of guiding desires and have difficulty handling desires. Those who say that orderliness must await the reduction of desires are those who lack means of restraining desires and have difficulty with an abundance of desires" (22/111/4-5).

<sup>130</sup> Compare with *Xunzi* 22/111/7: "A single desire received from *tian*, controlled by many things received from the *xin*, is certainly difficult to categorize as a thing received from *tian*."

The specifics of this process are somewhat unclear. According to Kline, “the habituation of new dispositions becomes the primary mechanism of transformation in Xunzi’s therapy of desire” (242). Kline treats “dispositions” as being the source of desires and suggests that they can be made to produce desires that accord with our sense of approval. This much is fine: Xunzi does suggest that dispositions may be altered and differ from person to person;<sup>131</sup> it stands to reason that part of moral cultivation entails working on a person’s dispositions in this way, especially since we often associate said dispositions with a person’s character. The ambiguity with Kline is that he discusses the cultivation process as producing “new” dispositions and desires, but also “reforming” dispositions and desires. The former phrasing suggests that Xunzi regards moral cultivation as instilling distinct disposition-desire sets, while the latter suggests that cultivation either builds on or in some way alters extant dispositions. These processes are not, of course, incompatible (i.e., cultivation could involve both), but it is unclear in Kline’s writing whether he takes both processes to be part of Xunzi’s account, whether cultivation involves just instilling new disposition-desire sets, or just a change in extant dispositions.

Given the transformative account of Xunzi’s program that I have given so far, I focus on the lattermost interpretation (or feature) of Kline’s reading of Xunzi. That is to say that, during the cultivation process, what occurs is a kind of habituation alongside a deepened understanding: the sense of approval and disapproval comes to reshape the dispositions themselves. The reshaped dispositions are promoral and, since the dispositions

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<sup>131</sup> See, for example, *Xunzi* 4/16/3: “People’s *qing* surely can be like the former or can be like the latter.” The passage is in reference to the contrast in quality between sagely and tyrannical kings. Earlier in the passage, Xunzi advocates properly instructing people so as to make them *ren* and orderly, which indicates a role for *qing*.

are the source of desires, the desires are also promoral. I think that elements of this interpretation of how Xunzi might be attempting to bring the self into a state of harmony are basically correct, although we should be careful about how we understand the particulars of Xunzi's account. Kline's discussion amounts to a person altering his or her dispositions and desires, both of which are tied to one's nature. This requires some elaboration. When Xunzi discusses those who have attained sagehood, he describes their *nature* as being no different from that of those who are not sages. As humans, we all have (roughly) the same nature and similar brute desires. This fact of having desires remains regardless of whether we follow the Confucian path in a sagely manner or not. The issue, then, is that moral cultivation involves transformation at the level of one's dispositions, but the dispositions are tied to one's nature, and one's nature is, according to Xunzi, simply "bad" and the same across all humans. How, then, can one come to be good like a sage?

What Kline is likely attending to is Xunzi's description of the sage becoming good by engaging in "*hua xing*," which we might translate as "transforming nature."<sup>132</sup> The idea is that transforming one's nature permits for the formation of new desires, or (arguably more accurately) the refinement of old ones,<sup>133</sup> such that one comes to feel, think, and behave in a manner wherein desires arise without causing internal contentiousness. The nature of the morally cultivated individual is such that it does not produce such inner strife.

If this is what is intended, though, then there appears to be a tension in Xunzi's work. Xunzi claims that the sage's nature is no different from the petty person's nature, yet he also claims that the sage conducts himself in a manner that is superior to the petty person.

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<sup>132</sup> See *Xunzi* 23/114/14-18. Compare also with *Xunzi* 3/11/12.

<sup>133</sup> Compare with David Wong's (2000) account of Xunzi as proposing enlightened self-interest.

One particular element of this conduct is that the sage's desires do not incite chaos. If the sage's nature is really the same as that of the petty person, though, and the petty person's nature is in some sense chaotic in its seeking of desire fulfillment, then what is different for the sage? One possibility is that Xunzi is referring to the sages' *original* nature as being no different from anyone else's, and that it is transformed during the attainment of sagehood. The idea is that sages and petty people *begin* with the same essential stuff, but only the former transform themselves. This might entail that the sages uproot their innate, crude desires and replace them with refined, morally appropriate desires.

The problem with this interpretation is that the nature of the sage does not seem to undergo so dramatic a transformation as to result in desire *replacement*. Sages are still human, and Xunzi repeatedly states that having desires is simply part of being human:

One's nature is the accomplishment of *tian*; one's dispositions are the substance of one's nature; one's desires are the responses of one's dispositions. Regarding the objects of desire as permissible to obtain and seeking them, this is something the dispositions cannot avoid. Regarding something as permissible and guiding, this is something that surely must issue forth from wisdom. It is such that even a gate guard cannot remove his desires; they are necessitated by his nature. Even the Son of *Tian* cannot satisfy all his desires. Even though the desires cannot be completely sated, one can come close to sating them. Even though the desires cannot be banished, their seeking can be regulated. Thus, even though what is desired cannot be completely obtained, the seeker can come close to fulfillment; even though the desires cannot be banished, when what one seeks is not obtained, one who is conscientious desires to regulate his seeking. (*Xunzi* 22/111/14-7)

The desires originating in nature are not abandoned or eliminated, even in those who are conscientious. Rather, the satisfaction of desires is (ideally) regulated by a refined sensibility of permissibility that guides behavior and prevents one from acting on desire alone (if at all). The sage, as a human, is presumably going to have to cope with desires as well but, being a conscientious person, will lack difficulty in dealing with them.

We might refine our account of the developing sage by looking at the notion of transformation to which Xunzi appeals, which he explains as follows:

When a thing's appearance changes, but is not itself made different such that it becomes something else, this is called transformation. Having transformation without being made different, it is called one and the same thing. (*Xunzi* 22/109/12-3)

Xunzi regards transformation not as a thing becoming *essentially different* from what it initially was; transformation here is more like adornment. In the case of nature, the moral cultivation process is not acting on a person's nature in the sense that it is fundamentally altering its kind, but transforming the person as a whole via the self-adornment that occurs through learning and practicing ritual. As Xunzi points out, human beings are more than simply their brute dispositions and the emotions, reactions, and spontaneous affective states that arise from them. Humans are also capable of artifice, particularly the practice of drawing distinctions. It is plausible that when Xunzi is discussing the transformation of nature, he is referring to its being coupled with artifice, specifically one's distinction-drawing with regard to the appropriate and inappropriate. This is the means of moral self-adornment for human beings,<sup>134</sup> and this seems to more accurately reflect Xunzi's argument without engaging in the full-on removal of extant desires.

One way in which this adornment of nature might take place is by refining one's dispositions. Again, although nature seems to be the same across persons, Xunzi does note that people can vary in terms of their disposition, and that at least this element of humans (in addition to artifice) can be in some sense worked upon. By working at one's dispositions to make them such that the desires they produce align with the refined sense of

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<sup>134</sup> Again, Robins (2011) further discusses the distinct roles of *wèi* and *xìng*.

permissibility, one becomes a more morally complete person. This is done by studying and practicing ritual teachings and then bringing one's dispositions into alignment with them. Since we are to understand dispositions as being akin to the material of nature (i.e., that by which the feelings of liking and aversion, delight and anger, and sorrow and joy are actualized and made palpable), this could be what Xunzi has in mind for transforming nature, and it is a prime candidate for something to be worked upon by artifice, particularly with regard to the practice of distinction-drawing.

We might think of the capacity and process of drawing distinctions and boundaries as the means by which we cultivate, socialize, and civilize ourselves. In distinguishing the appropriate from inappropriate, we set boundaries on our conduct similar to the way in which the grammar and words that comprise a language place boundaries on the kinds of expressions that can be exchanged and how said expressions can be understood. If this intention-driven ability is informed, then one can be expected to more accurately and reliably draw the same distinctions. If one has this ability to more accurately and reliably draw the same distinctions, then one can be expected to adhere to the principles that inform judgment.<sup>135</sup> Accordingly, one's judgment will not be confused by one's desires and the desires that one does have will ideally be checked by this ritually informed understanding. We might say, then, that ritual gives humans a way of completing or adorning themselves that relieves the stress caused by brute desires by providing a means of responding to them without contention, while also making consistent moral judgments. Even when such desires rise up, humans are able to deal with them, even fulfill them, in a manner that does

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<sup>135</sup> Consequently, if this system of appropriate and inappropriate, or right and wrong, is somehow standardized in a community, then all people in the community can also be reared in the same system of standards and cultivate similar notions of appropriate and inappropriate, right and wrong.



not shatter the harmonious state due to the way in which ritual education has restructured their understandings of and approaches to morally charged situations.

It is worth noting that this sounds very much like the Vygotskian model of utilizing sociocultural tools to restructure a learner's cognitive architecture. Several of *Xunzi*'s passages suggest that this is precisely what he has in mind for ritual education as well:

Ritual and *yi* are the beginning of order. The gentleman is the beginning of ritual and *yi*. Practicing them, habituating oneself in them, accumulating great regard for them, and making oneself fond of them—these are the beginnings of becoming a gentleman. (*Xunzi* 9/39/2-3, Hutton translation)

[The sages] raised up ritual and *yi*, and established models and standards, using them to rectify and adorn people's nature and disposition and correct them, and using them to train and transform people's nature and disposition and guide them. Only then could all begin to come to order and conform to the Way. (*Xunzi* 23/113/11-2, modified)

When a son yields to his father, a younger brother yields to his older brother, a son stands in for his father, or a younger brother stands in for his older brother, these two kinds of conduct all rebel against nature and contradict one's inborn disposition. Yet they are the way of a filial child, the proper form and order contained in ritual and *yi*. (*Xunzi* 23/114/4-5)

Another kind of person practices the rituals reverently, and his thoughts are restrained. (*Xunzi* 23/117/8, Hutton translation)

The purpose of ritual is to help humans to become more orderly, more harmonious, and to do so requires a fundamental transformation of the way we think about and approach morally charged scenarios. As the first passage notes, it is by acquiring and practicing ritual (and *yi*) that one begins one's path to moral cultivation. The fact that one must "practice" and "habituate" oneself according to these standards, as well as *learn* to esteem and love them,<sup>136</sup> implies an important change from a previous state. The second and third passages clarify that this previous state is that of one's base nature and (presumably original)

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<sup>136</sup> See again *Xunzi* 3/11/12 and 4/16/15.

disposition. Given Xunzi's diction, it appears that the modification requires engaging on a psychological level with the learners themselves, altering the manner in which they think and approach the social world as well as their own affective states. For example: from birth, Xunzi claims, humans have no tendency to defer to others; we merely seek immediate gratification. The ability to defer, even to delay gratification, must be learned and cultivated within each of us. Ritual's contribution to this process is that it helps provide and reinforce a pattern of thought that is conducive to these more deferential attitudes. The final passage indicates that, much like adopting and integrating a system like scientific methodology so that one can produce scientific concepts (i.e., think scientifically), ritual helps to constrain, shape, and direct the manner in which one thinks (i.e., think morally).

The similarity to Vygotsky's take on the role of sociocultural tools is immediately apparent: just as language helps to structure the flow of thought for Vygotsky, Xunzi treats ritual as a tool that helps to structure and organize affectively and morally oriented thought and behavior. The first passage referenced is particularly telling: just as language is to be internalized and then reproduced by the Vygotskian learner, the Confucian/Xunzian learner is also engaged in a constant cycle of acquisition, application, and refinement in the course of learning and utilizing ritual toward promoral ends. I will say a bit more on this matter of comparison in the subsequent chapter; suffice it to say for now that it is clear that the Confucians (or at least Xunzi) hold a view of the psychological function of ritual as being similar in function to language in the Vygotskian developmental picture.

There remains a particular concern for Xunzi's ritual program, and that is whether the presence of base desires will lead to internal discord.<sup>137</sup> Xunzi rejects the idea that such

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<sup>137</sup> I thank both David Wong and Chris Fraser for noting this potential issue.

desires must be eliminated or overwritten, so his account must be able to explain how one can coordinate them with a ritually informed attitude of approbation. The assumption is that the desire will conflict with what one feels is right or wrong, leading to psychological strife. For example, one who is married may feel a strong attraction to someone other than his or her partner. This person's cultivated attitude of approbation rejects the attraction, but presumably the desire persists. Does this not constitute a breach of internal harmony?

Perhaps not. Recall that, on Xunzi's view of psychology, the cultivated individual is ultimately capable of great self-control. Via one's artifice/*wei*, one possesses the power to do what is appropriate. This is coupled with the aforementioned transformation of one's disposition/*qing*, which permits one to alter the manner in which desires are produced from a crude state to a refined state. In fact, it is arguable that Xunzi believes that a *sufficiently* cultivated individual will not even have problematic cravings at all:

The gentleman knows that which is not complete and not pure is not sufficient to be beautiful. Hence he recites and enumerates his studies to make them familiar, ponders and enquires about them to penetrate them, makes his person such that he may dwell in them, eliminates obstructions in himself such that he may take hold of and elevate them. He causes his eyes not to desire to see that which is not right; causes his ears not to desire to hear that which is not right; causes his mouth not to desire to speak that which is not right; causes his *xin* not to contemplate that which is not right. He reaches the point where he loves it, and his eye likes it more than the five colors, his ear likes it more than the five tones, his mouth likes it more than the five tastes, and his *xin* considers it more beneficial than possessing all the world. Hence, power and profit will not disturb him; the multitudes and masses will not be able to shift him; all the world cannot wash him away. As for living according to what is right and dying according to what is right, this is called virtuosity of moral character (德操). Virtuosity of moral character is what enables one to be firm; being firm is what enables one to respond to things. One who can be firm and respond to things is called a complete person. (*Xunzi* 1/4/16-21)

The sufficiently moral person, one in possession of “moral character” (德操), is able to stand firm against distractions from what is morally right. Moreover, this quality seems to

enable one to actually direct his or her desires such that they *only* attend to that which is morally appropriate and reject or ignore that which is not.

Accordingly, Xunzi's response to the concern about having desires that conflict with one's sense of rightness seems to be that such scenarios will never arise for the sufficiently morally cultivated agent (i.e., the sage); the agent simply does not desire *as such* because (a) the agent is sufficiently learned so as to have a refined sense of permissibility and (b) this learning enables the agent to adorn/restructure his or her dispositions and, in turn, desires.<sup>138</sup> These features are important for Xunzi's account, as they leave intact the idea that moral cultivation does not result in an *abandoning* of desires but, rather, a broadening of sorts that is caused not by radically altering one's nature (*xing*) but, rather, by developing one's dispositions (*qing*) *coupled* with the refined abilities to deliberate and evaluate that are facets of *wei*. That which one comes to desire, following proper ritual education, will be the only options that are morally permissible. As such, the conflict of desires will never arise.<sup>139</sup>

This interpretation has the added benefit of avoiding contradiction for Xunzi, but my main goal is to clarify what I take to be Xunzi's psychological ideal. Desires come to align with the sense of approval and disapproval, and one is able to function harmoniously within the program of ritual that one has learned. Xunzi writes:

The sage knows about the problems of the heart's way, sees the misfortune of being fixated and blocked-up. Thus he is neither for desires nor for aversions; neither for beginnings nor for endings; neither for the proximal

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<sup>138</sup> This is not a *complete* explanation of how ritual helps to control desires in the truest sense: it does not explain in detail how or by what mechanism the brain is rewired to suppress desires and follow through on promoral dispositions. In fairness, though, no philosopher offers *this* detailed of an explanation.

<sup>139</sup> I stress that the case described is for the *sage* alone. Even here, though, it is important to note that abiding by ritual does not on its own guarantee that all of one's desires will be satisfied (e.g., hunger), nor does it mean that ritual places prescriptions on *all* features of one's action.

nor for the distant; neither for breadth nor for depth; neither for the ancient nor for the modern. He arrays the ten thousand things and in their midst sets up his scales. This is why the mottled mass of things is not able to obfuscate and make chaotic his categories. (*Xunzi* 21/103/16-8)

Learning and practicing ritual provides a way of judging that allows one to behave in a prosocial manner while uncontentiously satisfying desires. Further, there is no discord in the self, because the manner in which one seeks to resolve desires can be checked and ordered by the higher-order cognitive processes involved in one's *wei*.

Additionally, then, describing the changes in this way highlights another overlap between the Vygotskian and Xunzian notions of how learning restructures one's cognitive architecture, in this case by affecting the way one interfaces with the world by altering one's means of evaluation. Specifically, having the tool of ritual as a guide and structuring device for the way in which one interacts with the world provides one with resources for more sophisticated and promoral interactions. One comes, for example, to no longer desire water and approve of seeking water at any cost; one instead desires water and seeks it in a way that is fitting to the situation, to the community, and to being human. Assuming ritual learning is effective, if everyone in a community is able to engage in such an education system, the result will be a community that is both well-ordered and harmonious, thus fulfilling this aspect of the Confucian ideal in a psychologically tenable manner.

#### 4.6 Grounding out in habituation?

Before concluding, it is necessary to address a possible misunderstanding that may arise when looking at some of the passages I have used to explicate ritual's functionality in the Confucian picture. Oftentimes, ritual learning is described as involving "practice" and "habituation." This might lead readers to conclude that the moral education program

in ritual is simply a matter of forming good habits in practitioners: by repeatedly practicing the ritual forms, abiding by ritual eventually becomes a reflex; thus, the Confucian conception of moral development boils down to cultivating a collection of habits.

In point of fact, a number of established scholars have adopted this reductionist position regarding habituation and education in Confucianism. D.C. Lau (2000), for example, has argued that, based on Xunzi's position that ritual is a "device" created by the sages, "the only way of instilling it into people is by sheer drill and habituation" (210). Presumably, given Xunzi's particular focus on ritual as a tool of moral inculcation, Lau's claim here can be construed as a remark about the ritual education process (i.e., to learn ritual is simply to be habituated into ritual). Indeed, other interpreters have followed this line,<sup>140</sup> with some going so far as to describe ritual itself as "habit" (Ni 2014, 66).

Although this lattermost interpretation may be difficult to defend, the idea that habit plays a central role in the Confucian developmental picture is well-supported. Chris Fraser (2006) notes that, for Confucians, "[the] keys to education are habituation, concentration, having a teacher and model, and perseverance" (531).<sup>141</sup> I do not deny that habituation plays *a* role in ritual learning for Confucians. The problem is that this reading assumes (or, at very least, can make it seem) that ritual learning is *only* a matter of habituation. Were this the case, we should expect the language chosen by the Confucians to describe the education process as one akin to conditioning: one repeats the ritual practices again and again until one simply performs them automatically.

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<sup>140</sup> See, for example, Jiang (2012): "It seems that he is saying that moral requirements may be internalized by habituation and one can be transformed into a truly moral person in this way" (103).

<sup>141</sup> Similar remarks are made by Dan Robins (2007). Chad Hansen arguably adopts a similar view. See, for example, the chapters focusing on the Confucians in *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought* (1992).

In fairness to these scholars, it is not totally clear what their notion(s) of habituation entail. In this discussion, I will be using the definition of habituation commonly applied in the cognitive sciences, and acknowledge that it may be the case that this notion of habituation is not what the critics of the Confucian educational model have in mind. If it is not, then the onus is upon these scholars to clarify their definition(s) of habituation. For the limited purposes of this project and the sake of charitability, however, it is reasonable that I proceed without speculation as to what these alternative accounts might entail.

A common definition of habituation has been cited by cognitive scientists since 1966.<sup>142</sup> In a recent update of the common definition, habituation is defined as

a behavioral response decrement that results from repeated stimulation and that does not involve sensory adaptation/sensory fatigue or motor fatigue . . . Behavioral responses that undergo habituation may include any final output of the nervous system including simple reflexes such as pupillary responses and sweating, and muscle contraction or even motor neuron activity. One additional example is hormone release, which is the final output of the neuroendocrine system; hormones have a persistent action in regulating many behaviors. (Rankin et al. 2009, 136)

At the most general level, then, habituation amounts to a collection of automatic responses on the part of the body's neuroendocrine system. Constant exposure to specific stimuli, coupled with target scenarios and behaviors, may develop an association between stimulus and scenarios/behaviors in learners, resulting in their becoming habituated.

Assuming this understanding of habituation, what this would mean for the Confucian educational program in ritual is that it can be explained strictly in terms of associating certain behaviors with particular stimuli, with the rituals providing the context and materials of stimulation. On this account, what the practice (*xi*, 習) of ritual involves

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<sup>142</sup> See Thompson and Spencer (1966).

might be a kind of training and coaching. It is a common phenomenon, for example, to develop a daily routine as a matter of habituation: one wakes up around 6:00 AM, has a cup of tea, dresses, heads into the office, greets the colleagues already present, and then sits down for the day's labors. Part of what facilitates the smoothness of this routine is the habituation to both the processes involved as well as the accompanying stimuli (e.g., the alarm going off elicits a trained clicking of the button for deactivation, Cheryl's sing-song "Hello" elicits a reflexive "Hello, Cheryl," and so on). So strong can the habituation become that, one may find oneself going through the motions regardless of whether the appropriate stimuli are present (e.g., replying "Thanks, you too," when the server tells you to enjoy your meal). The analogous assumption for the Confucians is that learning ritual is also like this: upon seeing the person in mourning garb, one automatically shrinks away; upon meeting with one's superior, one automatically adopts a deferential posture, etc.

It is true that practice is a feature of ritual education, and the sort of habituation described above is likely part of this practice. In the previous example of coping with desires in Xunzi's program, it even appears that the ability to attend to only what is right and not desire that which is wrong is just the sort of automatic reflex that habituation might produce. We are also told, however, that elements other than practice are used in ritual education, reflection (*si*, 思) being perhaps the most notable. For the Confucians, reflection appears to have involved cognitive and metacognitive capacities including contemplation, deliberation,<sup>143</sup> reminiscence, and visualization.<sup>144</sup> These features are arguably present in

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<sup>143</sup> Indeed, the character "思" is also sometimes rendered as "deliberation."

<sup>144</sup> These latter two features are exemplified in a passage from the *Li Ji* (25.2/123/27-28), which associates thinking about features of a deceased person while fasting and ultimately visualizing them.



contemporary conceptions of reflection as well, but more importantly indicate that ritual practice involves a considerable amount of reflective activity on the part of the practitioner that will go beyond the reflexive behavior involved in mere habit and habituation.

Examples of ritual practice utilizing reflection and going beyond habit can be found by examining the relationship between the two concepts, which can be explained in terms of two recurring themes in the *Xunzi*: ritual as requiring reflection on the part of the practitioner, and ritual as an object of reflection itself. The use of ritual in helping to cope with the grieving process provides an example of the first theme, since the bereaved employ ritual to help both dwell upon and move past the death of a loved one. Other examples involve deliberating upon one's conduct while using ritual as a standard.

For simple-minded rectitude or scrupulous honesty, make it suitable with ritual and music, and enlighten it with reflection. (*Xunzi* 2/6/9, Hutton translation)<sup>145</sup>

As the long night is passing by slowly,  
I think long whether I acted wrongly.  
I lapsed not from the ways of high antiquity,  
Nor did I deviate from ritual and *yi*.  
So why should others' words be of concern to me? (*Xunzi* 22/110/17-8,  
Hutton translation)

These sorts of passages indicate that one should determine one's actions according to ritual, and that the determination of how to act is itself both part of the ritual and deliberative in nature. In these cases, according with ritual does not merely require that one behave according to habit, but that one act in consideration of the prescriptions of ritual.

The second theme is exemplified by passages encouraging learners to look at the ritual *itself* and attempt to discern its importance. For example:

The gentleman examines ritual carefully, and then he cannot be deceived by

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<sup>145</sup>A similar sentiment is expressed in 27/130/8.

trickery and artifice. (*Xunzi* 19/92/14-5, Hutton translation)

To be able to reflect and ponder what is central to ritual is called being able to deliberate. (*Xunzi* 19/92/17, Hutton translation)

Their nature does not know of ritual and *yi*, and so they must think and reflect and seek to know them. (*Xunzi* 23/114/21, Hutton translation)

In these cases, the practice of ritual demands reflection because ritual *itself* requires the attention of one's deliberative faculties. Rituals are collections of prescriptions, but the prescriptions themselves are (supposedly) directed toward social and psychological wellbeing. As discussed in the third chapter, sometimes the effective application of ritual may require flexibility on the part of the practitioner, such as in cases where one lacks the proper implements of ritual (e.g., materials for caps, money for offerings, etc.). In such scenarios, one is not permitted to merely abandon the ritual, so one must deliberate upon how to adapt to the situation while still maintaining the spirit of the target ritual. Were ritual merely a matter of habituation, it is unlikely that such reflection would (or could) be part of learning and practicing ritual. With such features of the Confucian model in mind, then, it is best not to reduce ritual education to habituation.

#### 4.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I provided an overview of ritual's functionality both in terms of its ability to provide for intrapersonal harmony and in terms of its ability to alter the psychology of learner-practitioners. This latter function, I argued, is akin to the Vygotskian internalization of language for the purpose of canalizing thought and action. What remains to be assessed is whether ritual, as a sociocultural tool, can supplement the Vygotskian account of learning and development with regard to the acquisition and expression of morality. This is the subject of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 5

### RITUAL AND MORAL EDUCATION

Having established Vygotsky's position as a viable model of learning and development, and Confucian ritual as a potential resource for moral education, we can now examine how the two programs can supplement one another. Specifically, I suggest that the Vygotskian account of *cognitive* development can provide good empirical grounding for the Confucian approach to *moral* development insofar as the Vygotskian approach requires skill learning. Likewise, the Confucian approach to moral development can supplement the Vygotskian developmental picture by providing a story for how one goes beyond mere skill learning to develop moral competence.

#### 5.1 Recap: Tappan's Gap

The Vygotskian account of moral development is designed not by Vygotsky himself, due to his early death, but by Mark Tappan. Tappan, following Vygotsky, asserts that moral development, as with other cognitive capacities, will arise from the internalization and application of certain social tools. Tappan proceeds with the assumption that *language*, which Vygotsky regards as extremely influential to development, will be the social tool that leads to, guides, and shapes an individual's moral development.

Reliance upon language as the sole or primary tool for moral development, however, faces several problems. Language alone seems to be incapable of instilling, developing, and refining several capacities that are typically thought to be components of

moral competence. These facets of moral development include the degree and quality of normative guidance that the tool can provide, the cultivation of empathy (including the development of an awareness of other minds like one's own), the association of specific affective responses with particular morally charged scenarios, and the moral imagination. As I cover these facets in more detail, it will become apparent that while language may aid in the development of a given facet of moral competence, language is insufficient on its own to either develop the capacity or provide a substantial basis for said development.

First, it is unclear that language provides sufficient normative guidance for practitioners of morality. This is partly because language is not goal (or end) oriented in the same way as morality. While language acquisition and competence certainly require exposure and socialization for a learner to completely develop his or her linguistic skill, natural language is also open-ended in the sense that, on its own, it does not provide direction to users with regard to what they *should* say (or do) in certain situations.<sup>146</sup> For example, in response to being paid a sincere compliment, language alone (or, perhaps more accurately, linguistic competence alone) neither encourages you to respond with a polite “thank you,” nor discourages you from responding with obscenity.<sup>147</sup> Morality, in contrast, requires practitioners to develop particular responses, such as awareness of the mental states of others and empathy/sympathy, for the very purpose of informing proper moral judgment and action; these capacities are arguably *not* required for linguistic competence. Moreover, the proper use of language does not *require* practitioners to engage their own or others' emotions when interacting, nor does it necessarily associate particular affective

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<sup>146</sup> At least not beyond grammar and semantics.

<sup>147</sup> If anything, language competency merely requires that the obscenity be grammatical.

responses with specific scenarios. Such engagement, however, is necessary in morally laden situations, and so we should expect tools for moral development to be capable of invoking such emotional associations.

It is also unclear that language alone can generate the sort of imagination involved in moral competence. This concern is related to the aforementioned cases of empathizing with others and association of affective responses with scenarios. In both cases, perspective-taking is involved wherein the practitioner must either place him- or herself in the shoes of another (e.g., as when empathizing) or analogize between relevant scenarios and affective reactions (e.g., imagining scenarios and then associating the common features and feelings among them). Such processes may also require the practitioner to engage in visualization that language on its own may once again be insufficient to invoke. If the practitioner encounters some moral instruction solely by language (e.g., via text or lecture), but has no experiential knowledge of the relevant details of the instruction, then the practitioner may fail to visualize what relevant scenarios would look like and, in turn, be incapable of applying the instruction. For example, one might be told that it is ritually appropriate to shake hands as a means of introducing oneself; it does not follow from this instruction alone, however, that one will effectively put this ritual into practice (e.g., what a handshake is, how firm it should be, what exceptions to this policy might exist, etc.).

While Vygotsky never explicitly discusses the role of imagination in morality, he does explain how development of the imagination influences the personality. According to Vygotsky, the imagination provides a means of engaging with the world and others. Regarding childhood development, Vygotsky makes the following observation:

The development of imagination is linked to the development of speech, to the development of the child's social interactions with those around him,

and to the basic forms of the collective social activity of the child's consciousness. (Vygotsky 1997, 346)

The imagination's development and function are intertwined with those of other faculties, making it one element among many that comes into play in our worldly interactions. In particular, the imagination can be a resource for cultural development and mastery, permitting humans to successfully interact with each other and the environment in general (*Ibid.*).<sup>148</sup> This process is bi-directional: as the imagination allows mastery of culture, so too does culture affect the development of the imagination. Certain developmental tools, such as language, help to shape thought and corresponding behavior. Vygotsky writes:

What is substantially new in the development of fantasy during the transitional age is contained precisely in the fact that the imagination of an adolescent enters a close connection with thinking in concepts; it is intellectualized and included in the system of intellectual activity and begins to fulfill a completely new function in the new structure of the adolescent's personality. (Vygotsky 1998, 154)

As the imagination develops, it is shaped by experiences and the other cognitive tools that one acquires because it develops in concert with the other cognitive elements of one's personality. This means that moral competence, as a facet of this developing personality, will also develop alongside (and possibly be partly developed by) the imaginative component as well.

While the Vygotskian project gives an explanation of the psychology of learning, then, it does not provide an account of why learning certain information and skills would ever lead one to become moral. Importantly, it does not explain how one comes to coordinate the previously discussed capacities such as awareness of others' mental states, empathy/sympathy, and other prosocial, promoral emotions with moral action. If moral

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<sup>148</sup> See also Gajdamaschko (2006, 38).

action genuinely requires such affective states,<sup>149</sup> then the Vygotskian program as given only gets as far as explaining how humans might learn to mimic certain behaviors; it does not explain how people come to have moral beliefs or be disposed toward moral behavior in any deep, intentional sense. In other words, the Vygotskian account can explain how humans might acquire a skill like language, but because (a) morality is a more complex skill and (b) morality is not *just* a skill,<sup>150</sup> the Vygotskian account that Tappan provides cannot fully explain moral development.

## 5.2 Filling the gap: ritual's role

The Confucian program, on the other hand, is designed specifically to inculcate morality and includes explanations of how ritual transforms humans to be reliably moral. Many of these explanations touch upon the very facets missing in the Vygotskian picture. For one, ritual provides humans with a blueprint for what actions to perform in a given situation, thus providing not only stronger normative guidance than language alone, but also a means of connecting the appropriate actions with the appropriate, requisite feelings. Confucian ritual is in one sense a means of establishing actions that are symbolic of certain emotions and dispositions: to perform a ritual perfectly, one must express the relevant

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<sup>149</sup> Some (but not all) strains of Kantian ethics will reject the idea that moral action includes an affective feature due to concerns regarding a heteronomous will. Most ethical systems, however, can either endorse the affective feature (e.g., virtue ethics) or at least accept the feature (e.g., consequentialism and Kantian positions less strict about heteronomy).

<sup>150</sup> Compare with Aristotle's comments in *Nicomachean Ethics* (1140b, 20-30), wherein it is argued that practical wisdom (in the service of morality) is distinct from mere skill (art); the former is an excellence (i.e., makes one a good person in an unqualified sense), but the latter only makes one good in a limited sense (i.e., good at something). Moreover, as Aristotle notes in the *Eudemian Ethics*, skills may allow the production of various, even opposite ends (e.g., the study of medicine regards health, but training in it grants knowledge of both health and illness; 1227a, 26-28); virtue, in contrast, *must* be directed at goodness.

emotion; to express the relevant emotion, one must actively possess said emotion.<sup>151</sup> A similar point about morality is made by Karen Stohr (2006), who notes that social conventions (e.g., etiquette) are the primary vehicles by which one expresses promoral sentiments (196). The implication is that being a moral person requires one to understand and adopt social conventions as part of the expression and exchange of moral sentiments. This is not to suggest that morality is simply conventionalism: as Stohr points out, “the conventions are the starting point....The thought may be what counts, but the vehicle for expressing it is itself part of the thought” (195). These conventions are regarded as essential to proper moral practice and serve an important role in coordinating affect and action.

Stohr’s discussion of etiquette highlights another way of understanding this point about how ritual could play a role that is similar to, but more compelling than, the role of language in Tappan’s attempt to add an account of moral learning to the Vygotsky’s account. In particular, Stohr’s arguments lead to the idea that these two “types” of rules (i.e., conventional and moral) are not as disparate as one might think.<sup>152</sup> Indeed, an often overlooked possibility is that moral rules might themselves be entwined with conventional practices, an approach that Confucianism seems to adopt. If so, then morally relevant conventions, such as ritual, could play a similar role to what language (itself a convention) does in Tappan’s attempt to add an account of moral learning into the Vygotskian program. This is because the rituals serve as the social tools (conventions) that facilitate, prescribe, and organize promoral interactions. Consider bowing: according to the *Analects*, it is

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<sup>151</sup> Ideally one will also be *receptive* to others’ ritual actions.

<sup>152</sup> Confucianism certainly does not regard them as such and, if Stohr is correct, this may be a similar case in any community since conventions play the aforementioned coordination role.



conventional for one to bow before ascending the stairs.<sup>153</sup> Yet this relatively simple action possesses a significant moral connotation; when one bows, one both expresses respect and (presumably) asks permission. Expressions of respect, however, are often thought to be morally loaded (e.g., the respect that one owes one's parents or lord), so the convention is linked to the moral rule in a significant manner. Of course, not all social conventions will be connected to moral rules (e.g., conventions developed for purely practical purposes), and not all of morality can be encapsulated in terms of performing actions as dictated by social norms. Nonetheless, interconnectivity between conventions and morality is common. Given the importance of conventions for socialization, then, ritual may by default present itself as a functional resource for moral inculcation.

Confucianism can also fill the gap in the Vygotskian position regarding the appeal to role models, specifically in the context of *moral* role modelling to which Vygotsky never speaks. One of Vygotsky's key observations is that development occurs first on the social level, then internally. Along this path, individuals that serve as "more knowledgeable others" (MKOs) help learners develop their skill competence over the course of social exchanges. Learners, through trial-and-error, constantly return to MKOs for assistance in further refinement of a particular skill, collaborating with them as a means of further developing. This means that the learning process is interactive, and that both learner and teacher work together to create new knowledge. It is also noteworthy that because the recursive phase does not necessarily mark an end in development, it may be repeated as a learner continues to refine his or her abilities and develop their understanding, making learning a lifelong process.

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<sup>153</sup> Supposedly to meet one's host or superior.

Confucianism places similar importance upon the role of the teacher, but emphasizes the particularly moral aspect of the education process. Such emphasis stems from the idea that moral learning cannot be performed in isolation for at least two reasons. First, the promoral texts such as the *Record of Ritual (Li Ji)*, the *Documents*, and the *Odes* are difficult to parse without having someone provide at least a baseline of information. As Xunzi notes, it is important for learners to model themselves upon competent teachers:

In learning, nothing is more expedient than drawing near to the right person. Rituals and music provide proper models but no explanations. The *Odes* and the *Documents* contain histories but no information about their present applications. The *Spring and Autumn Annals* is terse and not quickly understood. By modeling oneself upon the right person in his practice of the behaviors of the gentleman, then one will come to respect their universality, their omnipresence. Hence it is said, in learning, nothing is more expedient than drawing near to the right person. (*Xunzi* 1/3/20-1)

This leads to a second point: moral learning requires that one also *practice* what one has learned in order to both develop (internalize) the necessary behaviors and dispositions, as well as to better understand the material. These objectives are interrelated for the Confucians, who stress that part of moral cultivation involves learning to love both being moral and the study of morality itself.<sup>154</sup>

The Confucians, then, are committed to an educational theory similar to Vygotsky's with regard to the place of the MKO/instructor. What the Confucians add, however, is an important advisory or authoritative role that teachers should fulfill, namely the role of ensuring not only that learners become competent in deploying ritual actions appropriately, but also that learners cultivate the necessary emotions and understandings thought to be concomitant with the ritual actions. On this topic, and with regard to ritual in particular,

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<sup>154</sup> See, for example, *Analects* 1.1/1/3: "Learning and practicing what one learns in a timely manner: Is this not pleasant?"

Xunzi makes another relevant remark:

Ritual is that by which to correct your person. The teacher is that by which to correct your practice of ritual. If you are without ritual, then how will you correct your person? If you are without a teacher, how will you know that your practice of ritual is right? When ritual is so, and you are also so, then this means your disposition accords with ritual. When the teacher explains thus, and you also explain thus, then this means your understanding is just like your teacher's understanding. If your disposition accords with ritual, and your understanding is just like your teacher's understanding, then this is to be a sage . . . If you do not concur with your teacher and the proper model but instead like to use your own judgment, then this is like relying on a blind person to distinguish colors, or like relying on a deaf person to distinguish sounds. (*Xunzi* 2/8/1-3)<sup>155</sup>

This relates to the earlier point about the complexity of moral competency as opposed to simpler skill competencies: merely learning basic skills is not sufficient, since moral competence can only partially be accounted for in terms of basic skills. What is needed is the aforementioned cyclical process of guidance, trial, error, and refinement. As this process continues, the assumption is that the learner becomes more competent in the particular behavior(s). In the Vygotskian model, this process is represented by the learner's utilizing a MKO to expand his or her level of competence. In the Confucian model, it is much the same: instructors or exemplars provide instruction and guidance to learners who repeatedly practice ritual behaviors and other skills until they attain competence.

It is noteworthy that this aspect of the Confucian program fits with and supplements one of the plausible and desirable features of the Vygotskian approach. Specifically, guided practice of ritual does not involve mere rote memorization or mimicry; rather, learners develop by reflecting upon, interpreting, and engaging with the material and skills in which they are developing competence. Cognitive development, in the Vygotskian

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<sup>155</sup> Xunzi venerates teachers as moral guides throughout his work. For other prominent examples, see *Xunzi* 4/15/14-17, 8/33/16-19, and 23/117/16-23/118/1.

picture, requires learners to affectively engage the knowledge that they acquire and be able to reliably deploy said knowledge accurately and independently, without the prompting of a MKO. Similarly, Confucian ritual competence requires learners to have at least some underlying understanding of the ritual in which they are participating, or else they will be unable to practice it accurately or flexibly. Accuracy requires that learners be able to perform ritual behaviors according to instructed form in appropriate situations, inclusive of the requisite emotions; flexibility requires learners to have an understanding of when modification or improvisation of ritual is appropriate, again inclusive of affective states.

Yet another feature of ritual and ritual education might in some ways bring the Confucian ritual approach a bit closer to Tappan's reading of Vygotsky without falling into the same trap. I focus in particular here on the notion of a moral vocabulary. In language, vocabulary consists in the basic units of expression (e.g., words) that can be combined to form more complex expressions (e.g., sentences). In the Confucian tradition, rituals make up the basic units of conduct for morally appropriate interactions (e.g., bowing, fasting, sacrificing, music, etc.).<sup>156</sup> Ritual, then, serves as a means of moral inculcation by introducing moral vocabulary units that are functionally akin to Ronald de Sousa's (1990) paradigm scenarios. Paradigm scenarios are the means by which we are acquainted with and habituated to something like a vocabulary of emotion. They contain two components: (1) situation-type and (2) a set of "normal" responses, "where normality is first a biological

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<sup>156</sup> I suggest that understanding the content or purpose of a ritual is similar to understanding the meaning of a word; stringing together ritual practices in an orderly manner is akin to combining words to compose a sentence. Of course, it is an oversimplification to think of ritual as merely like words in a language, but it is a helpful metaphor. For an extended treatment of this approach to ritual, see Lewis (2012).

matter and then very quickly becomes a cultural one” (182).<sup>157</sup> The idea is that we are born with a variety of instinctive responses that, via socialization, are shaped to be employed in the expression of promoral emotions. Through stories and habituating situations, such as reading morally charged fables to children or learning to use a smile to elicit a desired response,<sup>158</sup> humans learn to react to a given situation by channeling the emotional responses in a manner that is conducive to conventional norms of propriety. The biological, emotional “gut response” to a scenario (e.g., feeling sympathy for an injured person) is linked to the cultural norms (e.g., the act of assisting that person). Ritual education pursues this goal: one acquires a repertoire of ritual to help one understand how to behave in a given situation. Doing so provides a better idea of how to relate to others and how best to respond to, and sympathize with, them. The result is that one learns how to properly care for others, which is at the core of the Confucian moral ideal of humaneness.

We can see how this feature of the ritual program can help to amend Tappan’s Vygotskian account. As noted by Tappan, language plays a key role in Vygotskian models because development, being a largely social process, requires the successful transmission of information between learners and teachers; this is facilitated by language. Ritual, however, is another resource by which at least certain varieties of information may be transmitted between members of a community. Ritual is particularly useful as a medium since it provides something similar to the semantic shorthand that inner speech does in the Vygotskian picture but, unlike inner speech, does so at both the internal *and* social levels. For example, a series of actions or a way of dress as prescribed by ritual may convey a

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<sup>157</sup> De Sousa seems to intend “normal” in the sense of statistical norms. Compare with, for example, Ekman’s (1967, 1969, 1970) work on universal facial expressions.

<sup>158</sup> Similar ideas are presented by Stern (2002, 13-14, 25-27).

complex collection of thoughts and, perhaps more importantly, feelings from one person to another. Having a shared knowledge of the ritual allows for such exchanges to serve as effective instances of communication, and this promotes (and itself is) promoral behavior. As such, a ritual component in a moral education program provides an important resource for instructing the expressive-communicative aspect of moral behavior as well.

Furthermore, and unlike Tappan's Vygotskian picture, the sophisticated system of disposition, affection, and comprehension entails that proper learning and practice of Confucian ritual can be incredibly complex and requires learners to go beyond merely adopting linguistic norms. A good example of such ritual practice can be found in Xunzi's account of how to provide for the recently deceased during their burials. Xunzi advocates the use of nonfunctional offerings for the deceased as a means of transitioning from grief to acceptance.<sup>159</sup> To make sense of how these practices serve the psychological needs of their practitioners, our story will need to make use of a number of cognitive and metacognitive capacities. For one, practitioners need to be able to understand how to both imbue the burial practice with emotional content and understand how said practices are intended to help regulate the emotions. Earlier, Xunzi discusses how the burial rites help one with returning to normal, peaceful living.<sup>160</sup> Here we see how such a goal might be met: burials provide practitioners with a means of both offering care for their deceased loved ones while also coming to terms with their passing. Hence, care is given to the dead

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<sup>159</sup> See *Xunzi* 19/95/9-13: "One uses the semblance of moving house, but also makes clear that the things will not be used, and these are all means by which to heighten sorrow."

<sup>160</sup> See *Xunzi* 19/94/3: Ordinarily in funeral rites, one gradually alters the corpse's appearance and changes its ornamentation, moves it farther away, and over time returns to peaceful living.

as *if* alive,<sup>161</sup> but the provision of nonfunctional utensils indicates an awareness that the person being venerated is no longer living and can no longer interact as *when* alive. These practices mark the gradual transition from pure grief to acceptance.

Such an approach can be built onto the Vygotskian program to produce a more complete account of moral development, especially as a way of expanding upon the notion of the importance of a moral imagination: the capacity of an individual to visualize (or at least hypothesize)<sup>162</sup> about morally charged scenarios.<sup>163</sup> Martha Nussbaum (1990) has repeatedly emphasized the importance of this capacity as part of her view of morality as a practical (as opposed to merely theoretical or rational) enterprise (139).<sup>164</sup> Nussbaum, drawing upon the literary philosophy of Henry James, suggests that moral knowledge is

not simply intellectual grasp of propositions; it is not even simply intellectual grasp of particular facts; it is perception. It is seeing a complex, concrete reality in a highly lucid and richly responsive way; it is taking in what is there, with imagination and feeling. (152)

The moral imagination, then, undergirds our ability not only to *think* morally, but to *perceive* the morally salient features of situations. Not only that, but the images and ideas produced and contemplated in the imagination are not general and abstract, but specific and concrete. These are the features that, according to Nussbaum, largely facilitate the development of the overarching moral capacity to be capable of going beyond mere rule-

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<sup>161</sup> Compare with Mark Berkson's (2014) notion of symbolic, "sophisticated pretend play."

<sup>162</sup> Some humans are incapable of imagistic imaginings, as with *aphantasia*. For details, see Zeman, Dewar, and Sala (2015).

<sup>163</sup> I will not address the question of whether the moral imagination is a distinct capacity from other varieties of imagination. There is at least some reason to suspect that it is not (e.g., Currie 1995), but for the purposes of this project, it is acceptable to remain neutral on this matter.

<sup>164</sup> Nussbaum takes herself to be adopting an Aristotelian position with the contrast group being the Kantian position (i.e., duty for duty's sake).

following and engage in genuine moral performance and improvisation (156-7). In turn, the moral imagination helps provide us with the appropriate actions to undertake in response to them on both emotional *and* rational levels.<sup>165</sup>

While Nussbaum focuses upon the use of literature as a means of engaging the reader's imagination and helping to develop his or her moral competence,<sup>166</sup> the Confucian account offers ritual as another plausible candidate for such a tool that makes use of and conjoins various metacognitive capacities. As a result, it provides an alternative to the problematic language-based account. A passage from the *Li Ji*, for example, emphasizes visualization while fasting in preparation for a sacrifice to deceased relatives:

During the days of fasting: think about the way [the deceased one] dwelt and resided; think about the way the person laughed and spoke; think about the person's aspirations and beliefs; think about what brought the person joy; think about that of which the person was fond. On the third day of fasting, you will visualize the person for whom you were fasting. (25.2/123/27-8)

Employing a kind of visualization or imaginative capacity might be intended as a means of helping with the coping process: the use of symbolic, nonfunctional tools to represent actual, functional tools requires one to utilize a sort of nonliteral thinking in caring for the dead, similar to what is seen in pretend play; special meditative thought combined with fasting might be a means of altering one's psychology such that it is easier to engage with feelings and memories about a lost loved one.<sup>167</sup> One might also look at the nonfunctional

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<sup>165</sup> Compare with the discussion of de Sousa's paradigm scenarios. Whereas de Sousa attempts to provide a psychological (even physiological) explanation of how stories can shape moral competence, Nussbaum approaches the topic from the perspective of the philosophy of literature.

<sup>166</sup> In the succeeding chapter, I consider the viability of stories as a tool for moral education and compare their potential effects on development with those of ritual.

<sup>167</sup> Again, compare with Berkson (2014).



utensils as props used in an episode of pretense, or the use of specific actions as stand-ins for more sophisticated expressions of sentiment, and think of such an imaginative capacity being used in other ritual practices as well. For example, in order to comprehend the act of bowing as a show of respect, one must understand that, in a particular context, the action of bending at the waist means something specific that it would not mean outside of that context. Such practices are akin to playing a game of pretend in which one treats a rug as a pool of lava and only carefully placed couch cushions provide one with any safety from a fiery demise: outside the context of the game, the rug is merely a rug and the cushions are merely cushions; within the game, they have special meaning. So too is it the case with ritual practices, in which practitioners imbue objects and actions with special significance.

Another issue that was problematized for the Vygotskian account, and that the Confucians can address with ritual education, is the need for a tool that is dedicated to helping one cope with and channel emotions.<sup>168</sup> Confucians hold the belief that cultivating and/or channeling certain emotions toward promoral behavior is part of cultivating a moral individual.<sup>169</sup> Xunzi, for example, claims that humans are born with certain dispositions/emotions (*qing*) that can be refined to produce morally competent persons:

These two dispositions [joy and sorrow] inhere in humans from birth. If one prunes and grows them, broadens and narrows them, adds to and subtracts from them, properly categorizes and fully expresses them, makes them abundant and beautifies them, causes root and branch, end and beginning to proceed smoothly and fit together, then they can be used as a model for ten thousand generations — such is what ritual does. (*Xunzi* 19/94/19-21)

Ritual education provides an important outlet and resource for the development and

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<sup>168</sup> This is not to suggest that we cannot use language as a resource for coping with and channeling emotions; we can and do, and we even use language in rituals directed toward such behaviors. Again, however, I point out that such behaviors are not, strictly speaking, the ends of linguistic competency.

<sup>169</sup> This is not a *distinctly* Confucian belief. Plato and Aristotle held similar positions.

expression of promoral emotions, such as the joy of loving or being loved and the sorrow of losing a loved one. Such emotions, from the Confucian perspective and plausibly from the modern perspectives as well, help establish an important basis for prosocial, promoral behaviors and habits.<sup>170</sup> By cultivating these emotions, one develops the respect and sympathy needed to coexist in harmony with others.

Relatedly, awareness of other minds is another feature of ritual learning and practice in the Confucian tradition that is not well accommodated (at least in Tappan's version) by the language-based Vygotskian account. Ritual can facilitate such a developmental process by helping develop a system for sharing an understanding of emotions and attitudes between individuals. Xunzi writes:

Physiognomizing a person's outer form is not as good as judging his heart; judging his heart is not as good as ascertaining his chosen course. The outer form is not superior to the heart; the heart is not superior to its chosen course. When the course is set straight and the heart follows, then even if one's appearance is ugly, so long as one's heart and course are good it will not obstruct one's becoming a gentleman. Even if one's outer form is good, if one's heart and chosen course are bad, then it will not obstruct one's becoming a petty person. (*Xunzi* 5/17/11-3)

Xunzi suggests that these intentions, motives, and affective states are what one should be primarily concerned with when evaluating the moral goodness of a person; moral goodness is discerned based on a person's (heart-) mind, rather than his or her physical appearance. Ritual provides practitioners with a means of "reading" the minds of others and, insofar as this is an intended purpose of the ritual, it presupposes that such minds exist.

This means of assessing via ritual is possible due to the previously mentioned fact

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<sup>170</sup> A similar idea presents itself in *Analects* 2.5 and 1.2, in which filial piety (*xiao*) is discussed as the basis for the moral ideal of *ren* (humaneness, benevolence). The idea (again) is that cultivating and expanding upon emotions such as love for one's parents can lead to one behaving in a promoral manner toward a broader population.

that ritual serves as a medium for much of human moral interaction. It fulfills a much needed role by augmenting the human capacity to relate to others on multiple levels, including an affective level arguably absent from Tappan's language-based approach. We can plausibly extrapolate that ritual education requires learners to develop awareness of the thoughts and feelings of others in order to comprehend and deploy ritual. This, in turn, influences overall perceptions of other persons. Several passages in *Xunzi* discuss the implications one's own behavior has for influencing others' perceptions of oneself. For example, *Xunzi* also writes:

To treat people well when alive but poorly when dead is to show respect to those with awareness and to show disrespect to those without awareness. This is the way of the perverse person and is an attitude of betrayal. The gentleman considers it shameful to use such an attitude of betrayal in dealing with servants and children and all the more so in the cases of those he exalts and loves! (*Xunzi* 19/93/7-9)

It is implicit here that treating someone well in life but poorly in death is akin to betrayal (or at least speaking ill of the person behind his or her back). It is not the deceased (those without awareness) who judge the living here, but other living people (those with awareness). In the same passage, *Xunzi* remarks on the pettiness of those who forget a deceased parent shortly after death and says that living among such people will certainly lead to chaos.<sup>171</sup> The implication is that others pick up on how one regards one's deceased parents. A person behaving in such a manner will acquire a bad reputation, for *others* see how this person regards the lives and deaths of loved ones. Ritual is how these dispositions are conveyed and so, to borrow again from the Vygotskian terminology, it serves as the

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<sup>171</sup> The parent-child relationship is highly valued in classical Chinese thought; not showing compassion for a deceased parent was showing that you did not care for a person who helped to produce, protect, and rear you.

social tool for instruction and comprehension of these matters.

In sum, although there is a significant difference in the aims of the Confucian and Vygotskian programs (moral versus linguistic competence), this is not evidence that the two programs are incompatible. On the contrary, highlighting these differences shows how the Confucian program can add to contemporary research in moral education and how a roughly Vygotskian developmental account can provide a basis for the project.

### 5.3 Distinguishing the Confucian position

Given these features, it should be possible to develop a curriculum of moral education by drawing upon the Confucian ritual program. Before proceeding further, it must be stressed that bringing Confucian elements into moral education need not entail the *exact* rituals or moral system that the Confucians prescribed, nor need it be a Confucian education program in the sense in which such projects have traditionally been construed.<sup>172</sup> The first aspect is logistically impossible: we do not have a complete and accurate record of the rituals that the Confucians prescribed. Even if we did, it does not follow that we *should* utilize the same rituals as the early Confucians. It may be the case that contemporary cultural and social structures render the rituals of 600-200 BCE insufficient for the purpose of meeting the psychosocial needs of modern humans. If so, then said rituals would certainly fail in their intended purpose. What we *can* consider is how it might be helpful to examine moral and general psychosocial development as involving a system of ritualized engagements (e.g., handshakes, funeral rites, etc.), and how such rituals can inform our

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<sup>172</sup> This distinction also preempts the objection that a Confucian component in moral education will necessarily result in indoctrination. It is not my intent to recommend Confucian “brainwashing” here, but merely to provide a tool that can be used in a variety of contexts and cultures to inculcate promoral behavior.

understanding of others as well as ourselves for the sake of harmonious interactions.

We can draw upon the aforementioned conception of ritual, derived from the Confucian tradition, as those prescriptions that guide and structure the performances and social divisions that embody and express respect and related attitudes.<sup>173</sup> In so doing, we abstract a general notion of what ritual *is* (and, in turn, what it *does*) that can be applied across multiple social contexts. Consider, for example, the common practice in many parts of the United States for males (and increasingly females as well) to remove their hats while seated at dinner. This is a practice guided by a particular social prescription: removing one's hat in this situation conveys respect to one's host and others at the table. The meaning of the hat removal is comparable to Confucius's bowing before ascending the stairs in 9.3: in both cases, the individual is signaling, via a particular performance, respect for others. It need not be the case, however, that the individual at the dinner table subscribe to a Confucian viewpoint regarding ritual, let alone the entirety of the Confucian moral project. Rather, the individual need only be said to be adhering to the ritual of conveying respect by removing his or her hat at the meal. This understanding of ritual is based in, and congenial with, the Confucian tradition, but it is also completely separable. As such, discussions of ritual via Confucianism that are provided in this chapter should be looked upon not as endorsements of the Confucian program wholesale, but as convenient and effective means of elaborating upon the viability and applicability of a ritual program.

Second, what is theorized and what is practiced can often diverge; the Confucian

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<sup>173</sup> In the third chapter, I provide a detailed account of what early Confucians take ritual to be. One of the important features of the extended definition of ritual is that the term covers not only prescriptions on performances, but also certain social divisions (e.g., noble and lowly, ruler and ruled, etc.) that were regarded as central to maintaining harmony within the community.

program is no exception to this. Despite a long textual tradition emphasizing critical and reflective thinking by students, modern understandings of Confucian education perceive the approach to be highly authoritarian and unreflective.<sup>174</sup> When we speak of students receiving a “traditional Confucian education,” many tend to think of it in terms of long hours of memorizing texts along with a single instructor’s explanation of said texts. Such a program emphasizes rote learning over reflection. While text memorization and careful instruction were necessary parts of the traditional Confucian curriculum, they were certainly not the entirety of what was espoused by the texts. Despite this, the “Confucian tradition” in practice does seem to have deviated significantly from the classical ideals. The focus of this project is upon ritual education as derived from pre-Qin Confucian *theory* rather than the *practice* as it has transformed over the course of history.

There are other ways in which we can abstract our notion of ritual from its Confucian origin, including dropping the aspect of ritual as prescribing social divisions. The Confucians seem to regard such an aspect as necessary, since they treat almost all relationships as hierarchical in nature and because the relationships between people form the fundamental basis of society. What is more, proper enactment of ritual on this view often entails an awareness of one’s relational standing with regard to others, and thus any ritual performance must be sensitive to social status (e.g., elder-younger, superior-inferior, noble-base, etc.). It is not clear, however, that such assumptions must (or should) be made regarding ritual in non-Confucian contexts. Consider greeting rituals: although some

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<sup>174</sup> In the past, Chad Hansen (1992) has described Confucianism as “unreflective traditionalism” (340). More recently, Chris Fraser (2012), comparing knowledge acquisition in *Xunzi* and *Zhuangzi*, raises concerns of the rigidity of Xunzi’s system in particular (14). Similar worries appear in Eric Schwitzgebel’s (2007) account of the Xunzian educational program (154), although Schwitzgebel does not attribute such rigidity to Mengzi’s account of learning.

cultures require that one's performance of a greeting ritual be considerate of factors such as relative social status, such as the *wai* in Thailand, it is not apparent that such sensitivity is required for the performance of a handshake in the United States. Social divisions *might* still come into play for some exercises of ritual, but it may not be a *necessary* feature of ritual across the board. For the purposes of this project, this aspect can be dropped.

Additionally, it will be helpful to uncouple our notion of ritual from some other theoretical baggage that the Confucians may have attached to it. According to the Confucians, the rituals are historical artifacts, practices established by the sage kings to meet particular human needs and harmoniously coordinate action. Presumably, since the rituals were designed to sate psychosocial as well as material needs, one could (to varying degrees of accuracy) trace back through history the origin of a particular ritual practice, bound up with which would be its initial intended purpose. Consider Mengzi's account of the origin of the practice of burying one's parents:

Presumably, in the past there were those who did not bury their parents. When their parents died, they lifted them up and tossed them into a ravine. After some time, they passed by and saw foxes and wildcats eating the corpses; flies and mosquitoes sucking at the bodies. A sweat appeared on their foreheads, and they looked away, unable to bear the sight. This sweat was not a show for others, but came, from the center of their hearts, to their faces and eyes. They returned with hods and baskets of dirt which they used to cover the bodies. If covering the bodies was truly right, then the filial child and person of *ren*, in covering his deceased parents, surely is following the Way! (*Mengzi* 5.5/30/22-5)<sup>175</sup>

The burial rites originated for two reasons. First, they satisfied personal psychological needs (compassion and shame).<sup>176</sup> Second, they satisfied interpersonal demands that arose

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<sup>175</sup> "The Way" is a common translation of "*dao*," its significance being that it refers to the morally ideal lifestyle advocated by (in this particular context) the Confucian tradition.

<sup>176</sup> For Mengzi in particular, these needs are natural impulses of humans. Mengzi held that humans were good by nature, so a considerable amount of the moral authority of these impulses is derived from this

from the nature of the parent-child relationship. Both sorts of needs are common among humans and, as such, easily accessible from personal experience.

For the purposes of this project, it is unnecessary to speculate on whether rituals possess traceable genealogies that can be accessed either directly or by historical record.<sup>177</sup> All that is necessary is that rituals provide accessible, comprehensible, and memorable prescriptions for practitioners so that they may easily integrate into personal experience. This is because humans frequently employ recollection of past events to inform current and future action. By appealing to common, easily detectable actions of others (e.g., rituals), individuals undergoing moral development have a model from which to learn. A traditional reading of book ten of the *Analects*, for example, takes it as presenting a number of anecdotes in which Confucius practices ritual behavior and some details of those practices. Additionally, at various points in the *Analects*, Confucius exhorts his students to reflect upon either personal experience or documented cases of morally laudable behavior to both determine appropriate action and understand why such action would be appropriate (e.g., behavior at court and at home, how to treat to a mourner, how to sit and dress at various events, etc.). The implication is that such experiences provide a basis for an important part of moral development, namely learning specific behaviors and drawing upon feelings related to (and that were part of) past experiences to develop promoral dispositions (e.g., sympathy). These features alone are sufficient to make ritual an attractive tool.

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belief. Other Confucians, such as Xunzi, did not necessarily equate naturalness with goodness, but did share with Mengzi the concern that such impulses, insofar as they were needs, deserved consideration.

<sup>177</sup> In fact, it is probably better not to speculate at all on this matter. Although the Confucians often suggest that the rituals were intentionally designed, this may not be the case for many cultures (nor even for ancient China). It is probable that rituals evolve in much the same way that languages and biological species do, with some of their features serving a particular purpose and others being accidental.



It is also useful to further restrict the scope of prescriptions covered by ritual. On the Confucian account, rituals encompass prescriptions for those performances that convey respect and related attitudes. Such an account, however, seems to extend to a number of practices, including displays of etiquette (e.g., keeping one's elbows off of the table and not wearing hats indoors). These practices exemplify good upbringing and might be thought of as resources for conveying a respectful, or at least civil, demeanor. The Confucians would likely be content to include such practices under the banner of ritual, but this does little to distinguish ritual as a resource for moral education in its own right. To this end, and for our purposes, we can focus our account of ritual exclusively upon those prescriptions that entail (as an ideal) the exercise of an affective component: ritual is supposed to prescribe not only behavior, but also thought and feeling. When one is performing the burial rites for a parent, one is *supposed* to be experiencing feelings of loss and remembrance; when one is keeping one's elbows off of the table, it is supposed to be a show of respect for the host and other diners, but etiquette is strictly a means of expression and does not itself require that one hold some affective state.<sup>178</sup>

To further clarify my account of ritual, it will also help to explicate a characteristic of ritual that is actually compatible with the Confucian tradition. Specifically, there are constraints on ritual's mutability: rituals are flexible in nature, since circumstances may prohibit fulfilling the prescription in its ideal form, but there are limits on how far one can adjust the ritual without losing it. For example, burial rites might prescribe wrapping a body in linen and interring it in multiple wooden coffins. In the absence of sufficient

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<sup>178</sup> As noted earlier, one may perform what is prescribed by ritual without having the concordant affective states; still, such affective states are ideals and part of the ritual prescriptions. The point is that such states need not even be idealized for etiquette to be effective, nor need they be part of etiquette itself.

resources or tools, however, certain allowances might be made: the body might be wrapped in silk if linen is unavailable, and a single coffin might be used if wood is scarce. What is important is that one approximates the ritual as best as one can, since what is at stake for this ritual is the proper conveyance of respect and feelings of grief. Knowing what the ritual is intended to express helps one to alter the ritual to best suit both psychosocial needs and practical considerations. It does not permit one to simply do away with the ritual, but it does constrain how one can modify it.

Finally, it will also help to specify that ritual prescriptions are communal rather than individualistic (i.e., wholly unique to one particular person).<sup>179</sup> This feature might seem obvious, but it is important to note since a major function of ritual is to facilitate promoral interactions between members of a community. Ritual is expressive in nature, but there are many ways to express oneself, some of which are idiosyncratic.<sup>180</sup> Consider, for example, mode of dress: in some communities, it is considered appropriate to dress in a certain fashion when at work for the purpose of promoting camaraderie and collegiality among coworkers; when not at work, one might dress as one pleases, and one might adopt a peculiar style to emphasize one's uniqueness. In adopting one's own style, however, one might break from communally shared understandings of dress and what they might convey. In such cases, one might not dress or otherwise behave inappropriately, but one is still behaving in an idiosyncratic manner. This sort of stylization stands in contrast to the types

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<sup>179</sup> This constraint is consistent with the Confucian account, but it helps to distinguish my account of ritual from the idea of "personal" or "psychological" rituals (e.g., behavior based on personal compulsions).

<sup>180</sup> My use of the term "idiosyncratic" should be understood here as focusing on the feature of distinguishing, individuating, or setting one's self apart from the rest of a population. This would make such practices more akin to personal preferences than rituals in the sense that I am using the term.

of rituals targeted in this project which, as sociocultural artifacts, must be shareable between members of a community both during instruction and beyond.

#### 5.4 Relevant findings in modern developmental theory and research

In addition to abstracting ritual from the Confucian tradition, the Vygotskian account of cognitive development, along with other recent research, can provide empirical grounding for the ritual education model. These considerations are significant since any moral developmental theory we adopt or draw upon should be corroborated by our most recent findings in the empirical sciences. Although ritual is central to the Confucian moral education model, its place in moral developmental theory has remained largely unexplored in current psychology. Fortunately, even in the absence of explicit investigation of ritual as a tool for moral development, there are findings in contemporary research that yield empirical support for the viability of a ritually based program of moral development.

For one, there is evidence to suggest that ritual, as something that can be enacted, may be better suited to moral instruction than mere verbal transmission. Beaudoin-Ryan and Goldin-Meadow (2014) have recently documented the differences in the development of perspective-taking capacities between learners placed in programs that utilize gesture (i.e., hand movements produced during discourse) during instruction and those that do not. Subjects were exposed to a series of moral dilemmas and asked to develop hypothetical resolutions to each. During the phase in which subjects reported resolutions, they were split into groups that encouraged gesture, prohibited gesture, and were neutral to gesture (2). Interestingly, those subjects encouraged to gesture more reliably demonstrated multiple perspectives with a plurality of resolutions; equally interesting is the fact that those prohibited from gesturing displayed a diminished ability for perspective-taking (5). The

upshot of these findings is that, insofar as perspective-taking is a feature of moral competence, gesticulation seems to aid in moral development and performance. This is good news for ritual since, although not all ritual is performative, a good portion of it is, requiring practitioners to engage in a number of gestures among other full-body activities.

Additionally, there is support for the idea that approaches akin to the use of ritual can aid in the inculcation of promoral behavior by way of inculcation of sympathy and empathy. As I have argued, ritual can facilitate such developments by providing an effective means of sharing emotions and attitudes between members of a community. Xunzi, again, is relevant here with his suggestion that the manner in which one practices ritual (including whether one practices at all) demonstrates to others one's attitudes. Another example appears in the *Analects*:

Upon seeing someone in mourning garb, even if it was a mere acquaintance, he would alter his countenance [to one of reverence]. (10.25/25/24)

Rituals can serve as signals that, when received by an understanding and responsive practitioner, elicit a sympathetic or empathetic reaction. The possibility of such an outcome is supported by research in early childhood behavior, which suggests that emotional and moral development are related. Lagattuta and Weller (2014) note that moral development positively correlates with the capacity for awareness and understanding of others (387, 390, 399-400), meaning that increasing feelings of sympathy/empathy can lead to a more reliable display of moral behavior. Given the importance of empathy to the development of moral competence, we should expect a moral education program to be capable of eliciting such responses when cued, and the ritual approach should be capable of doing so.

Other findings resonate with the Confucian belief that ritual can contribute to the cultivating and/or channeling of certain emotions that encourage promoral behavior. Multi

and Ongley (2014) suggest that emotions play a key role in children's development by guiding moral decision-making by either anticipating outcomes of courses of action or by providing feedback concurrently (167-8). Negative consequent emotional outcomes become incorporated into a child's memory and, in turn, moral thought process, ultimately discouraging the associated behavior(s). Thus, in subsequent, similar interactions, the child anticipates a similar emotional outcome and considers this element prior to acting. The opposite results are to be expected of events producing positive emotional outcomes, which are more likely to elicit associated behavior(s) in the future. With these details in mind, recall Xunzi's claim that human emotions/dispositions can be refined to produce morally competent persons. In these cases, ritual plays a key role in ensuring that such elaboration occurs. From an expressive/communicative perspective, this is achieved by providing suitable social forms for the accompanying and/or requisite emotions entailed by given situations. The result is that particular emotions or feelings should come to be associated with particular circumstances and moral understandings (thus establishing the aforementioned moral vocabulary). The fact that an associative feedback loop regarding emotion and experience does seem to occur in development suggests that this is, at least tentatively, a fruitful approach to moral education.

Another empirically supported aspect of ritual is its usefulness as a concrete resource (i.e., as a sociocultural artifact) for the purpose of education. Recall the previous discussion of how rituals provide accessible, comprehensible, and memorable prescriptions for the sake of easy integration into personal experience (e.g., as in the *Analects*). The Confucians seem to assume that humans tend to best understand morality by piecing together actual, emotionally accessible examples of behavior and *then* forming principles

to make coherent patterns out of said behaviors.<sup>181</sup> Xunzi, for example, indicates awareness of such facts when discussing how, in attempting to debate with and educate others, one should utilize examples that are both fitting to a situation and accessible to one's audience:

The difficulties of persuasion consist in using the extremely lofty to encounter the extremely lowly, using the extremely orderly to encounter the extremely chaotic. In such cases, one cannot approach things directly. If one uses remote examples, then one risks being misunderstood; if one uses recent examples, then one risks being crude. One who is good [at persuasion] is in between. (*Xunzi* 5/19/17-5/20/1)

If learners cannot relate to the cases being discussed, let alone access them in a useful way, then the educational pursuit is a nonstarter. Against the backdrop of empirical findings, these features of ritual suggest that it would be highly efficacious for moral education, since accessibility is so valuable to effective moral learning. A relevant observation is made by Malti and Ongley (2014): humans (at least at early points of development) tend to demonstrate greater overall moral competence in self-reports when faced with cases from personal experience rather than hypothetical cases. Citing a study by Wainryb et al. (2005), Malti and Ongley point out that, when forced to confront morally charged scenarios in which they had participated, subjects between five and sixteen years of age constructed their reports in manners that showed greater awareness of the mental states of their co-participants compared to reports in which subjects were asked about hypothetical cases (173). This suggests—in support of the Confucian use of rituals in moral education—that when recollecting specific, personal experiences, humans are more prone to engaging their

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<sup>181</sup> A similar point is made by Amy Olberding (2008), who discusses “exemplarism” in the Confucian tradition. According to Olberding, the attention paid to particular individuals (e.g., the sage kings, Yan Hui, Confucius himself, etc.) is intended to direct readers not merely to illustrations of ideal behavior, but to exemplars who are the “genesis” of the more abstract ethical concepts espoused in Confucianism. This idea garners additional support from Xunzi's explicit treatment of the origin of ritual and *yi* as being a product of the behavior of the sage kings, rather than something extant independent of human artifice.

own emotions in their moral reasoning *and also* taking into account the emotions of others than when asked to reason at the more abstract level of hypotheticals.

To summarize: ritual's overlap with the empirically supported educational framework of the Vygotskian position, alongside empirical support for a number of other features of ritual (e.g., enactment, sympathy inculcation, emotional association, and example-based learning), all lend to its credibility as a resource for moral education.

### 5.5 Is it anything new?

At this juncture, one might be willing to accept that the appeal to ritual is distinct from certain modern approaches, but question whether it offers anything particularly novel from a philosophical vantage point. Aristotle, for one, emphasized the importance of habituation in his *Nicomachean Ethics*. If one of the main functions of ritual is to inculcate sensitivity and reflexive responses to morally salient triggers and contexts, then could the Western tradition not simply look to Aristotle's account of habituation for ideas?<sup>182</sup>

There is a resonance between the positions of Aristotle and the Confucians with regard to the cultivation of promoral character traits (i.e., "virtues"). Both advocate such traits due to their perceived moral value, and recommend training and education to ensure ideal moral development. This recommendation arises because Aristotle and the early Confucians regard virtues, at least in their perfected or near-perfected forms, as

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<sup>182</sup> The contrasts I make here are exclusively between habits and habituation as articulated by Aristotle and the account of ritual that I have proposed. Neo-Aristotelians may be able to accommodate or coopt some or all of the features I suggest to be characteristic of ritual. Although I will not address how ritual might compare with such hypothetical programs, in the subsequent chapter, I will expand on the merits of ritual as a tool for moral education and distinguish it from several other potential tools. Such contrasts may provide some clue as to how the ritual program could fare against these alternative accounts of habituation.

noninnate.<sup>183</sup> A proper upbringing is needed to ensure that humans develop the foundations for moral development and, in Aristotle's case, these foundations consist in habits.

While it is unclear what precisely Aristotle understands habits to be, a general consensus in Aristotle scholarship suggests that he regards habits as cultivated predispositions to act in certain ways.<sup>184</sup> This understanding of habits maintains their aforementioned noninnateness and also provides at least a thin understanding of the nature of habits that fits with Aristotle's use. More troublesome, however, is the matter of how one is to go about the process of habituation to develop these promoral predispositions. Shortly after introducing the concept of habituation, Aristotle goes on to suggest that habituating for virtues is much like habituation for other skilled practices, such as the arts: these are skills that develop over a long course of practice by doing; so too can virtues be habituated by constantly performing acts that require the expression of the various virtues.<sup>185</sup> At its base, then, Aristotle's habituation process is simply a matter of repeatedly being placed into morally charged scenarios and learning to deploy the relevant practices with such canniness that said practices eventually become reflexive.

Given that ritual is a tool for structuring socialization and conditioning certain promoral dispositions in humans, it might seem that much of the ritual model that I have been suggesting can be accommodated by Aristotle's habituation process. In particular,

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<sup>183</sup> Aristotle makes such a claim at the beginning of *Nicomachean Ethics* II (see 1103a19-25); the idea appears at various points in the Confucian texts, with Xunzi providing an entire treatise on the need for cultivation ("Human Nature is Bad"). Even for Mengzi, who thinks humans have innate promoral tendencies, there is still need for cultivation. Neo-Confucians are a different story, as they do regard humans as being innately morally good and perceive cultivation as being a process of removing obstacles to this perfect state, rather than building upon something not yet perfect. As such, all references to Confucians and Confucianism herein should be construed as referencing *pre-Qin* or *classical* Confucianism unless otherwise specified.

<sup>184</sup> See, for example, Randall (1960), Broadie (1991), and Sherman (1989).

<sup>185</sup> See, for example, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1103a33-b22.



Confucianism advocates repetitive practice (*xi*, 習) as a means of instilling moral dispositions.<sup>186</sup> I do not reject the potential utility of Aristotle's attention to habituation; I agree that it is compatible with the appeal to ritual as a tool for moral development.

The ritual model, however, is far from simply being Aristotle repackaged. First, Aristotle offers few specific tools for moral development aside from the thin account of practice by doing.<sup>187</sup> Presumably to cultivate courage, one should perform (or at least begin by attempting to perform) courageous acts. This proposal, however, gives the learner little in the way of concrete tools with which to start. The learner will still require assistance in determining the nature of a courageous act, how to identify one, and how to go about performing one correctly. A good moral teacher could provide these details, but that teacher will still require resources with which to convey this information. Demonstration of courageous acts is possible, but demonstration alone still leaves much to be explained for the learner, especially with regard to the constraints on proper moral conduct. Accordingly, additional tools will be of great advantage to moral instruction, even in habituation.

What is more, Aristotle's habituation process is largely an individual enterprise. This is to say that habituation is regarded in the context of a single person's development rather than to development of a group or community. Such an approach to habituation may result in an individual developing his or her own standards of moral practice, but does not necessarily guarantee that these standards will be the same as those held by others within the community. Assuming that an intended outcome of habituation is that the individuals

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<sup>186</sup> See again *Analects* 1.1/1/3.

<sup>187</sup> Aristotle does suggest that laws and customs are useful for habituation and, likely following Plato, suggests that music is useful to this end as well (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1179b32-1180a5). The way in which Aristotle employs these tools, however, seems to be akin to the "practice by doing" approach (e.g., a good citizen practices following the laws). I take ritual practice to require something beyond such repetition.

composing a community will have compatible standards of practice, it will be helpful to ensure that resources are employed to supplement individual habituation in such a way as to make sure that the individuals composing the community will be on the same page.

To these ends, ritual can readily contribute. As mentioned previously, rituals are designed to place prescriptions on moral conduct and foster promoral dispositions, including relevant affective states. They give specific, concrete guidance for learners and offer instructors a resource by which to convey relevant details. Perhaps most importantly, they provide a prototype of action that can be used as a preset for activity in future, similar situations (i.e., as with the paradigm scenarios of de Sousa). Additionally, rituals are *shared* standards of practice in the sense that they are employed by a community rather than just an individual. This feature allows ritual to bridge the individual-community gap by giving learners a basis for mutual understanding of moral standards that goes beyond Aristotle's individualized picture.<sup>188</sup> While compatible with Aristotle's habituation (and, in fact, likely conducive to it), the appeal to ritual is still a distinct and nuanced approach to moral education. Appeal to ritual is not, then, simply a restatement of Aristotle's position.<sup>189</sup>

A few further distinctions can also be made. First, Aristotle's process of habituation is directed at the cultivation of particular virtues. While elements of Confucianism can be described as a virtue ethic, the account of ritual on offer here is relatively neutral with regard to moral theory. Describing ritual education as theoretically neutral is to say that the

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<sup>188</sup> Aristotle was not, of course, interested *strictly* in the development of the individual.

<sup>189</sup> Even Stohr (2006), who is working from an Aristotelian perspective, suggests that such a program of cultural learning is undertaken *in addition to* habituation, noting that "anyone who aims at being virtuous in Aristotle's sense ought to be reading good etiquette books. Practical wisdom is incomplete when it cannot be exercised effectively and effective exercise requires knowledge of how to employ the rules of etiquette to express and reflect the aims of virtue. Likewise, the practice of etiquette is empty unless it is accompanied by an appreciation for the expressive role that manners play in our lives" (210-211).

use of ritual as a tool of moral education is not limited to virtue-ethical theories; it can also be applied to other types of moral theory as well, such as consequentialist and deontological positions. For example, if one's underlying moral theory is a form of utilitarianism, then it is built around the principle of engaging in actions that promote optimal utility within the community.<sup>190</sup> This policy is in no way antagonistic to the ritual education model, since ritual's primary function is to place prescriptions such that they frame and help guide interactions in morally charged situations. If anything, ritual can still serve as a frame and guide for those attempting to parse a situation and determine what the morally appropriate course of action would be (in this case, whatever would optimize utility). Ritual, then, is a viable resource for training under various moral theories, not just virtue ethics.

Second, and as noted toward the end of the fourth chapter, ritual education is not merely reliant upon habituation. Habits are, by their very nature, reflexive dispositions. Upon acquisition, they are deployed more or less automatically and without any reflection on the part of the one deploying them.<sup>191</sup> It is not clear that this is necessarily the case with all ritual performances. It is true that some rituals are designed to inculcate certain behaviors and attitudes that will ideally become reflexive (e.g., exchanges of respect in

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<sup>190</sup> Certain forms of Kantianism may pose a problem, as an affectively based motivation would be at odds with Kant's strictures against heteronomy of will. These positions assume, however, that it is possible for humans to act primarily or entirely from a sense of duty (as opposed to other motivations). It is not clear that the ritual program would necessarily be problematized in the case of the former, since moral reasoning is a complex capacity, and ritual training may enhance one's ability to reason and act from duty (alongside other affective states) and even place duty at the forefront of one's moral reasoning process. The latter case may prove to be problematic if a sense of duty is, as it is regarded in some Kantian literature, a nonaffective sensibility, but then the Kantian position would be at odds with an abundance of contemporary psychology that suggests that affective states do play a very important role in reliable moral functioning.

<sup>191</sup> This is not to suggest that Aristotle's virtues collapse into habits; this would problematize Aristotle's distinction between passions, states, and excellences. Aristotle does, however, suggest that habituation is an important step toward virtue cultivation (although it is not entirely clear how one is to then move from habit to excellence, or if this is even the appropriate way of understanding the developmental process). My point is specifically that the ritual-based program in moral cultivation seems to "break" from the practice of habituation at a distinctly different phase when compared with its ancient Greek counterpart.

greetings), but it may not be the case that other, more complex rituals are so simple. Consider the recurring example of the funeral. First of all, this sort of ritual is not frequently repeatable and, therefore, is not one that can be explained in terms of habituating practice. Second, though, is the fact that the very nature of the particular ritual calls for the bereaved to look inward and reflect on his or her relationship with the deceased person.<sup>192</sup> This is not mere reflex, as the funeral practice is not innate but created and instantiated as a social institution. Rituals, then, are not merely practices of habituation. Habituation can and likely does occur in the ritual education model, but it cannot be the whole of the practice.

## 5.6 Conclusion

I have argued that a notion of ritual, abstracted from pre-Qin Confucianism, is a useful supplement to a Vygotskian approach to moral education. By informing the Confucian idea that ritual helps provide adequate form to emotional expression and comprehension with the Vygotskian account of development, and supplementing this account with the resource of ritual, we see how ritual can assist in developing morally competent and invested people. What remains is to offer a defense of this position against potential objections. In particular, although I have defended the contributions of ritual as *theoretically* original, I have yet to demonstrate that what ritual can offer is *practically* distinct from other educational tools. Additionally, given the theoretical nature of my argument thus far, there are still concerns about ritual's scope of efficacy. These are the sorts of problems with which I will contend in the next chapter.

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<sup>192</sup> As Hagop Sarkissian (2008) points out, Confucian learning practices include not only study (*xue*, 學) and practice (*xi*, 習), but also reflection (*si*, 思) (25). A similar point is made by P. J. Ivanhoe (1990), although Ivanhoe seems to attribute this feature of the moral development program to Mengzi in particular (478-479) and less so, if at all, to Confucius and Xunzi (475, 484, 488).

## CHAPTER 6

### A DEFENSE OF RITUAL'S VIABILITY

The previous chapters have explained how we might develop an approach to moral education by supplementing a Vygotskyan developmental picture with a tool adapted from Confucian ritual. The implication is that we can generate an effective program in moral education by utilizing this general notion of ritual as a means of inculcating and refining promoral dispositions. Such a program in ritual, however, faces a number of concerns. For one, it is unclear whether ritual can add anything to the moral education process, especially when considering the alternative sociocultural tools that are already utilized for instruction (moral or otherwise). Additionally, one might worry that ritual brings with it a number of drawbacks that actually make it counterproductive to moral development. Furthermore, there is an empirical question about just how effective ritual really is. This chapter addresses these concerns and argues that, while ritual is not a *panacea* for moral education, it can safely fulfill a useful and distinct function in a contemporary setting.

#### 6.1 Recapitulation and direction

The three preceding chapters develop an extended account of the nature of ritual and argue for its utility as a tool for moral education. One might be concerned, however, that all of this argumentation leads to a moot point: as established in the very first chapter, various sociocultural tools are already employed to facilitate learning and development in general; it would come as a surprise if these resources could not be utilized for moral

education in particular. In fact, tools such as parent-child discourse, morally charged stories, and even games can be (and are) used to help inculcate promoral attitudes. Although ritual was distinguished from certain other cultural constructs in the third chapter (e.g., laws, policies, punishments, etc.), these sorts of learning aids may come closer to filling the function for which rituals are apparently intended. One might question, then, whether an appeal to ritual as a sociocultural tool of development is redundant or, even worse, deleterious to an individual's development when the learning environment is already equipped with a variety of instructional tools.

Furthermore, while the Confucians regarded ritual as a subject of utmost importance in learning, there is reason to be skeptical of how far-reaching and lasting the effects of ritual might be on one's moral development and performance. This is partially because, while ritual is a valued part of many communities, it is not readily apparent that ritual is a crucial feature of communities pan-culturally. If not, then it is questionable how accessible ritual is to the general human population, and whether ritualized moral education is viable across all cases. This concern is compounded by the fact that the majority of empirical literature discussed so far focuses only upon childhood and early adolescence education, when humans are arguably more likely to be influenced by things such as rituals. Adults lacking a previous background in ritual learning may be less moved by a program in ritual and more affected by immediate environmental stimuli.

Accordingly, the types of concerns that ritualized moral education faces might be grouped along three general lines: 1) concerns regarding the distinct contributions of ritual, 2) concerns regarding whether ritual is deleterious to moral development, and 3) concerns regarding the efficacy of ritual as an instructional tool for moral education. This is not an

exhaustive list of concerns, but it is sufficient to provide us with a starting point from which to evaluate the account of ritual that I have thus far provided.

The aim of this chapter is to respond (as best as possible) to these three general concerns. The first concern will require a consideration of the contrast between ritual and tools such as stories and games, one that distinguishes ritual by its functionality and specific aims. The further concerns about whether ritual is counterproductive and ritual's overall efficacy are more complicated, but can ultimately be addressed by arguing that ritual, while not providing a magic bullet for moral education, can still perform a useful function despite challenges posed by factors such as learner obstinacy that may vary with age and culture.

## 6.2 Ritual's distinct function

In the third chapter, I contrasted ritual with several other cultural constructs that might be thought to play a similar role. The primary difference I noted was that ritual is, by design,<sup>193</sup> directed *specifically* at developing moral character, whereas tools such as laws and penalties need not be, nor are they enforced or practiced in (exactly) the same way. This provides an explanation for how ritual is distinct from these other institutions, but there are a number of resources for developing moral character that have been studied by scholars of education and that may be less distinct from ritual, either in terms of their basic composition or their overall effects. If ritual cannot be distinguished from such resources, then there is little need to advocate ritual as a new resource for moral education: everything that it is and can do is already extant in current practice. To assuage this concern,

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<sup>193</sup> This is, at least, how ritual is understood on a *Xunzian* picture (i.e., constructed to aid in moral development). Other Confucians, particularly Mencians, may offer a different account. I will not engage the question of whether these positions are ultimately compatible or not here.

this section provides a distinction between ritual and several common instructional aids in education, namely general parent- (or educator-) child discourse, stories, games, and etiquette. I take these to be among the most common resources for moral education currently on offer, so distinguishing ritual from them should go a long way toward addressing the worry about ritual's distinctness as a resource.

### 6.2.1 *Discourse*

Discourse may seem a strange place to start my contrast with ritual, mainly because discourse and ritual (and, indeed, discourse and any of the other tools that I will be considering) appear to be very different things. Rituals, after all, are well-established prescriptions that, at least in the Confucian context, are broadly shared throughout a community. One might think that discourse is a tool for moral education only insofar as it is by verbal language that we communicate much of the information that we hope to share; this does not seem to be anything special. As noted by Larry Nucci (2014), however, despite the considerable variety across cultures with regard to how parents socialize their children, the general process of socialization is itself pan-cultural and heavily reliant upon conversations (and, in fact, conversational patterns) between parents and their children (370). For example, despite differing approaches to admonishment and the degree of shaming imposed, both Western and Asian parents employ strategies of requiring their children to reflect upon misbehavior and develop an understanding of the wrongness of their actions (or, at very least, to habituate an aversion to such behavior).

We can say more about these findings: as Peggy Miller (2014) notes, both Western and Asian families frame discourse from bystander (in which the child only listens to the recounting of events) *and* co-narrator (in which the child is a participant in reconstructing



the narrative) perspectives to reflect upon appropriate and inappropriate behaviors (427-8). Recall from the fifth chapter that personalization of moral experiences tends to have a greater impact on learner retention and understanding than appeal to abstract concepts. The relation of personal anecdotes, either as a co-narrator or as a bystander, is a plausible means of inculcating promoral dispositions and, although the use of these two frames differs in degree between cultures, they are common approaches to socialization in both.

Other patterns that are common for parent-child discourse are noted by Qi Wang and Qifang Song (2014). They include: (1) explicit moral evaluations; (2) discussions of moral, social, or family rules and behavioral expectations; (3) parental appeal to the child's feelings; (4) encouraging perspective-taking; (5) inductive reasoning or induction of emotion; and (6) direct or indirect advice-giving (237-8). Laura Sterponi (2014) also observes six techniques for priming children to acknowledge their own misbehavior or potential misbehavior: (a) request for an account, (b) correction, (c) reproach, (d) minimal prompt, (e) accusation, and (f) lament (126). Although Sterponi's priming techniques are observed specifically in the context of Italian families, it is likely that they, too, are relatively common across different cultural settings. The point is that, despite differences in parenting techniques between (and even within) cultures, parent-child discourses remain important tools for developing dispositions for proper conduct in society.

Even with these culturally consistent (general) patterns and tactics of discourse, it is still difficult to make an argument for how discourse is similar to ritual in the sense of functionality: both might be used to help in the moral education process, but rituals are sociocultural prescriptions that require activity (*doings*) from learner-practitioners; discourse may impart (*tell*) significant moral information to learners, but the discourse on

its own does not *require* that the learners practice that information. An apt way of phrasing this, then, is that the discourse-versus-ritual contrast can be put in terms of telling-versus-doing. To participate in a discourse, the instructor must communicate (*tell*) information to a learner; the learner (ideally) receives it.<sup>194</sup> To participate in ritual, however, requires that the learner practice (*do*) the ritual. The telling-versus-doing distinction, then, reveals a stark contrast between the functions of discourse and ritual.

There are, of course, certain patterns of discourse that are more ritual-like in nature. For example, it is common practice in many classrooms for the teacher to enter the room on each school day and greet the students, with the students responding in turn. This sort of call-and-response practice is structured and routinized in a way that appears, at least on its face, ritualistic. We might then further adopt the practice of routinizing other moral components into the discourse as well (e.g., asking each student to say one good thing he or she did outside of the classroom on the previous day). In this way, the discourse becomes directed at inculcating morality and further aligns itself with the ritual program.

At such a point, however, it seems that such a form of discourse has itself become part of the ritual, if not the ritual itself. If the discursive practices in question are so specific and repeated so as to function in the same way that certain rituals do, then it may be fair to call such practices ritual. The question, then, is whether ritual education can make a distinct contribution to moral development if parent-child (or teacher-child) discourse can go a long way toward proper socialization. If rituals are, as I have argued, construed as the prescriptions governing those practices having to do with expressions of respect and related

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<sup>194</sup> Of course, even here it is open as to whether the learner must receive *and* internalize the information, be predisposed to act on it after the discourse, or whether paying attention is required at all.

dispositions, then there is good reason to think that there is.<sup>195</sup>

To be sure, ritual is intended to help in the development of these dispositions as well, but it need not be the case that ritual is the *sole* tool by which this undertaking might be performed; discourse can go a long way toward achieving this as well. On the other hand, the “how-to” of moral performance will require knowledge of the prescriptions provided by ritual, and these may be (partly) conveyed during parent-child discourse. It is necessary to emphasize that the discourse alone is typically insufficient to provide all of this information: in matters of performance, humans typically benefit most from practical walkthroughs that allow them to gain firsthand knowledge (simulated or otherwise) of just how to effectively perform an action (e.g., riding a bike) or exemplify a quality (e.g., learning how to be generous by witnessing or actually performing generous acts).<sup>196</sup> As such, it is probably best not to think of discourse as a competitor of ritual in terms of the function it provides for moral development but, rather, as a complementary resource.

### 6.2.2 *Stories*

Before proceeding with the distinction between rituals and stories, it is worth distinguishing between stories and *story-telling*. For the purposes of this project, it is best to understand the latter as a performance and the former as a script. I make this distinction for two reasons. First, I am concerned that readers may accidentally conflate the two and, in focusing upon story-telling, regard stories as being performative in the same way that

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<sup>195</sup> Additionally, insofar as rituals are supposed to be *shared* within a community, they also seem to diverge from discourses which, by their very nature, can be private and unrepeatable.

<sup>196</sup> This draws upon the distinction between procedural and propositional knowledge (i.e., know-how and know-that) articulated by Gilbert Ryle (1946). The former refers to knowledge one acquires for practical skills, while the latter refers to knowledge about propositions that can be classified as true or false.

the Western tradition typically regards rituals as performances.<sup>197</sup> Recall, however, that while rituals may be performed, what makes them rituals is the fact that they are prescriptions and, as such, may be enacted (hence, “performing the rite” can be construed as “following through with the prescription”). Second, and relatedly, this will more closely align the notions of rituals and stories and, in turn, make clearer why a distinction is needed.

With this in mind, we can elucidate the nature of the story relevant to moral education and how it is comparable to, but distinct from, our notion of ritual. I briefly touched on the idea of how stories are useful tools for moral education earlier, referencing the work of Ronald de Sousa on paradigm scenarios.<sup>198</sup> Recall that paradigm scenarios are a means by which humans become acquainted with and habituated to having certain emotional responses (the so-called “normal responses”) to certain stimuli and contexts (what de Sousa calls the “situation-type”). Via socialization, our basic emotions are primed to be activated upon encountering certain situation-types; socialization that is promoral in nature will channel these emotions to be properly deployed in particular moral scenarios. The emotional reflex to a scenario (e.g., feeling sympathy for an injured person) is linked to the cultural norms (the act of assisting that person).

To this end, stories (or at least stories containing a moral or collection of morals) might be thought to serve as useful media for paradigm scenarios. This is a reasonable assumption: a number of children’s stories include at least subtle moral undertones; the hero’s triumph is typically achieved in a manner that we are taught is laudable and that we are expected to emulate. In this sense, the morally charged stories of modernity are akin to

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<sup>197</sup> I will suggest that there is a kind of activity involved in reading or hearing stories, but the activity does not constitute a performance in the sense relevant to ritual.

<sup>198</sup> See page 141.

the legends of the sage kings to whom the Confucians often appeal: they provide insight into the minds and actions of moral exemplars that we can (and are often told that we should) hold up as models. Stories that are particularly moving can go a step farther, achieving the function of the paradigm scenario by enticing audiences to empathize with the protagonists, thus channeling and formatting their emotional responses as well. All of these features suggest that stories can provide an important function for moral education.

Stories are powerful educational tools and, like rituals, are deeply embedded within cultures and their histories. They are also capable of acting on and influencing emotional reactions, channeling them toward promoral ends. An important difference between rituals and stories, however, is the practical component: rituals inherently possess a requirement that they be enacted; stories do not. We might think of this as being akin to the difference between passive and active learning methods. In passive learning, the source of instruction provides information to the student who then records it. In active learning, the student works toward engaging with, analyzing, and manipulating information under the guidance of an instructor. Passive learning might be exemplified by teaching a student the alphabet; active learning is exemplified by laboratory research (e.g., testing hypotheses).

The passive-active distinction illustrates the differences between stories and ritual. When learning ritual, part of the learning process entails that one learn to put the ritual into practice either in terms of particular performances. Although this process typically requires guidance by a more knowledgeable other, it is still incumbent upon the learner to hone his or her skills with regard to properly enacting the ritual both in terms of developing the relevant dispositions and deploying the corresponding behaviors. Stories, in contrast, can help develop empathy between audiences and the protagonists that represent particular

moral ideals, but there is nothing in the story itself that *requires* members of the audience to go and put those dispositions and behaviors into practice.<sup>199</sup> Rather, it falls upon the reader/listener to take up the moral instruction or allegory for him- or herself and then enact it. In doing so, however, the reader/listener has to go beyond the context of the story itself. Aesop can tell us, for example, about the importance of being reliable and not deceiving others, but we as an audience must then choose to take that moral advice and put it into (effective) practice. Ritual learning, in contrast, entails practicing the ritual.

On this note, it might be argued that part of attending to a story requires that the attendee must *interpret* the moral messages of the story, and in this sense stories are participatory. This may be a plausible explanation of what engaging with a story requires, but then it is clear that what goes on in using a story as a tool for moral education is quite different from what goes on in practicing ritual. Ritual arguably does require interpretation on the part of practitioners, but it also requires enactment in other ways (i.e., having an understanding of the ritual is insufficient; it must also be put into practice), and training for proper enactment is part of the ritual education process. The story, again, does not have a further practical feature requiring that the learner put its moral(s) into practice; that, as previously mentioned, is contingent upon the learner. There is a concern, then, as to how much influence a story on its own can have over a learner's path of moral development.

This concern is moderately supported by empirical findings. A study conducted by James S. Leming (2000) that placed students in the first through sixth grades in a literary-

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<sup>199</sup> I emphasize here the issue of requirement. Certain elements of a story (e.g., provision of a moral, breaking of the fourth wall to address the reader, etc.) can be construed as a story explicitly placing demands upon the audience. Such aspects, however, need not be appropriated by the audience for the story to come to completion. Ritual, however, does require that its prescriptions be enacted to come to completion.

based character development program reported an interesting collection of findings: although students across all grades demonstrated improved *cognitive* outcomes with regard to morality (i.e., ethical understanding), results for affective and behavioral outcomes were either mixed, minor, or limited only to a subset of students (e.g., only fourth through sixth grade students demonstrated any improved behavior after the program) (413, 422). One of the possible takeaways from this project, and one of the suggestions that Leming himself makes, is that a purely literature-based program might be sufficient to improve ethical understanding, but other methods and resources might be necessary to more reliably elicit promoral attitudes and behaviors. By utilizing such resources alongside moral literature, it is probable that greater improvements will be seen not only in moral cognition, but also in the areas of affective and behavioral responses.

This is not to suggest that stories are inherently problematized as resources for moral education since, as previously mentioned, they can be very effective when they do garner audience empathy and channel promoral emotions into a consistent tendency to act accordingly. Indeed, Leming's research shows that stories *are* useful for moral instruction, even if they are not independently sufficient. The problem is in constructing the appropriate stories for the appropriate personalities or age groups and then conveying them effectively, and this general issue of knowing one's audience faces almost all tools for moral education, ritual included. Even so, however, it should be abundantly clear that rituals and stories are distinct tools for moral education given their differences in both form and functionality.

### 6.2.3 Games

Of the tools addressed so far, games are in some ways the most complex, and are similar to ritual both in form and function. For the purposes of this project, I will adopt the

notion of games popularized by Bernard Suits (1967), who defines game-playing as:

[engaging] in activity directed toward bringing about a specific state of affairs, using only means permitted by specific rules, where the means permitted by the rules are more limited in scope than they would be in the absence of the rules, and where the sole reason for accepting such limitation is to make possible such activity. (156)

From this account of game-playing, we can abstract that a game is an activity constituted by rules that constrain permissible behavior and, further, construct the space of the game itself (i.e., should one largely cease to abide by the rules, one ceases to play the game).

This is a somewhat broad notion, and it seems that Suits does not think that games are simply *any* instance of abiding by rules for the sake of making possible a certain state of affairs. Many daily tasks would also fall under this definition. Rather, part of what makes a game a *game* is the inseparability of the rules of the game and the desired ends: should one break from the rules of the game, then the attainment of the state of affairs that is the goal becomes impossible (150). Consider a game of solitaire: one could simply order and stack each suit of cards by drawing them one-by-one from a whole deck and placing them face-side up, but doing so would violate the rules, and in fact the very puzzle, that makes solitaire the game that it is. Furthermore, it is important to note that the states of affairs that arise from participation in a game are contingent: they are binding only for as long as the game is perpetuated by the player or players (151). As such, we should understand our account of games to be sufficiently distinct from many other nonlusory states of affairs that may otherwise share similar features with games and game-playing.

This understanding of games has the potential to make them an excellent resource for instruction. It is widely accepted that effective teaching tools are ones that engage learners on multiple levels and that also hold learner attention for substantial periods of



time. This has led some educational theorists to “gamify” learning experiences to improve retention of information and skills by students. Wendy Hsin-Yuan Huang and Dilip Soman (2013) have recently developed a guide for how to apply gamification interventions in education, and cite Yu-kai Chou as describing the gamification technique as “the craft of deriving all the fun and addicting elements found in games and applying them to real-world or productive activities” (6).<sup>200</sup> The goal of gamification, then, is to increase the fun, and in turn the productivity, that one derives from engaging in an otherwise mundane activity. By applying gamification, instructors hope to improve how fun the experiences are and, as a result, also improve student engagement and performance on the target activity.

There is empirical support for this approach. As noted in the aforementioned study by Garzotto (2007), use of an “edutainment” game resulted in an overall positive learning experience for participants. Juho Hamari, Jonna Koivisto, and Harri Sarsa (2014) also suggest that, at its base, gamification can have positive educational effects, although such effects are highly sensitive to a number of factors, particularly with regard to the context in which gamification is deployed, the design of the game itself (e.g., simplicity, degree of immersion, etc.), and aspects of player/student personality (e.g., competitive versus noncompetitive personalities). In general, however, gamification can be an effective means of eliciting learning-conducive behaviors.

One might question whether games can be used as effectively for moral education in particular, especially since many games appear to lack moral content (e.g., Connect

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<sup>200</sup> Admittedly, what constitutes “fun” is indeterminate. I assume my readers will share at least a rough conception of fun, but for the purposes of this paper it helps to clarify that fun refers to entertainment/enjoyment. Obviously, what one finds entertaining/enjoyable is at least somewhat subjective, but this is partially why some people prefer to play particular games over others (if they enjoy games at all).

Four) or include content that many would condemn as morally repugnant (e.g., video games in the Grand Theft Auto series). The obvious move for the proponent of games is to suggest that we focus only upon games that *are* designed to heavily emphasize promoral content. This move, however, meets with another, highly ironic, concern: empirically, morally repugnant games seem to be overwhelmingly ineffectual in bringing about immoral behavior in players.<sup>201</sup> If games do not encourage violent actions, then why expect them to fare any better for eliciting morally laudable actions?

These are understandable concerns, and I cannot address them in the space of this project. What I will suggest, however, is that it is arguable that games can and do aid in skill development, and ethical decision-making might at least have certain features toward which games can contribute. Decision-making in general is a skill, and most skills can be expanded upon and refined; this is a position held in both the Vygotskian and Confucian traditions. Games provide a resource in which skills can be developed by simulating environments in which the target skills are put to use. Assuming that ethical decision-making is the sort of skill that can be developed, and given what we know of moral development this is quite likely, it is plausible that at least certain sorts of games could facilitate ethical development at least in this sense.

It is worth noting that not just *any* sort of game will do as a resource for moral education. A good game will be both fun and effective in training up the target skillset. For morality, this might mean a game that helps condition the player to behave and feel in promoral ways. Accordingly, Peter Lloyd and Ibo van de Poel (2008) recommend

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<sup>201</sup> See, for example, Przybylski, Ryan, and Rigby (2009). The study reported suggests that violent games tend to draw players with a preexisting interest in violence, rather than to make players more violent.

designing games that simulate ethically charged scenarios in various contexts and require participants to parse the dilemmas faced as best as possible. Lloyd and van de Poel suggest that such simulations provide a ‘practical’ experience that requires participants not only to utilize ethical and situational knowledge, but to also be genuinely, affectively involved in the situation (446). The implication is that such simulations will not only allow participants to refine their ethical decision-making skills, but will also predispose them to more effectively deploy these skills in actual ethically charged scenarios.

There are undoubtedly similarities between games and rituals. For one, both require that participants adopt and act based upon certain restrictions. The prescriptions of ritual govern and guide certain behaviors and social standards; similarly, games restrict permissible actions that one may take within a certain, contingent context. Additionally, certain games and rituals are more or less central to (and sometimes across) particular cultures (e.g., baseball as the American pastime; communion within Catholicism). As such, both provide commonly shared, recognizable patterns that participants can follow. Finally, both rituals and games are things that can actually be *practiced* by participants and, in fact, can at times be construed as having been instantiated through those practices (i.e., transformed from mere prescriptions to a tangible thing that is being enacted). Insofar as both games and rituals might be useful tools for moral education, they certainly do take on similar forms and offer similar, empirically supported benefits for practitioners.

It is important to note, however, that there are severe disanalogies between games and rituals. First, and most obviously, games (at least according to Suits’s notion) are discontinuous with typical social living in terms of creating a lusory environment, whereas rituals are either continuous with social living or, when they are not, need not employ a

lusory environment (Suits 1967, 151-2).<sup>202</sup> On the first note, there is a sense in which rituals *construct* the realm of social interactions or, at very least, play an important part in structuring them. Games, in contrast, are contingent: their rules are only binding so long as the lusory environment persists. One might object to this distinction by pointing out that gamification already blurs the line between the lusory and the mundane: if tasks as ordinary as walking down stairs can be gamified (Huang and Soman 2013, 6), then certainly we cannot say that games are *always* contingent. This objection, however, assumes that, simply because games can be played in otherwise mundane situations, the line between game and not-game is blurred; this need not be the case. The fact that an act such as walking down the stairs can be gamified implies that the mundane act has been *transformed* into something that it previously was not. In place of the mundane, a lusory environment has been established, thus the game is still discontinuous with the rest of the social world.

Still, one might contend that rituals can also be discontinuous from the typical social world, at least in a certain sense. Burial rites, for example, occasionally employ role-play (e.g., impersonators of the dead) and symbolic gestures (e.g., offering of material goods) that only hold value in the context of the ritual.<sup>203</sup> These particular prescriptions seem to be divorced from the rest of one's social reality since, outside the context of the burial rite, they lack this particular meaning. One could reply that because these gestures are intended to facilitate human psychosocial wellbeing, there is still a sense in which they

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<sup>202</sup> Suits points out that a game cannot “command ultimate loyalty,” whereas we would expect certain other sorts of rule-based institutions (e.g., morality) to have a higher authority.

<sup>203</sup> Scholars of Daoism will be reminded of Chapter 5 of the *Dao De Jing*: “Heaven and Earth are not *ren*, treating the myriad things as if straw dogs.” The straw dog was an effigy used in sacrificial practices. It was dressed and placed on an altar during the ceremony, then simply discarded afterward. The adornment and subsequent discarding represent neither love nor malice; the straw dog is merely an instrument.

are continuous with the typical social world, but then one might make the same argument for game-playing. A better distinction here, then, appeals to the aforementioned lusus environment and Chou's notion of the "fun" nature of games: the contingent environment that games establish is *intended* to be fun and enjoyable; the environment established by certain rituals *need not* be.<sup>204</sup> In fact, at least in the case of the burial rites, the environment is supposed to be sorrowful. A game, however, must be at least potentially fun, and this alone marks an important distinction between rituals and games.

This is not to suggest that one must enjoy playing the game for it to be a game, nor that one must feel sorrow to participate in the burial rites, but in each case the practice *is designed* to generate, facilitate, and channel these feelings. This leads to another important distinction: whereas rituals ideally engage practitioners on an affective level that is promoral,<sup>205</sup> and exemplary performance of rituals entails this affective engagement, such a feature is *strictly optional* in both the design and practice of games. Games can be more or less immersive in design and players can be more or less committed (emotionally or otherwise) to their roles: a game involving high fantasy role-play, for example, is likely to be more immersive than a game of chess or poker. In the former case, one makes believe that one is a knight or a wizard or a dragon; getting into the role is part of playing the game. In the latter case, one need not assume the part of the knight or the queen in order to play (in fact, such a thing is likely quite rare). Even in cases where games are immersive, such as the case of simulations, there still seems to be at least a slight gap between the sort of

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<sup>204</sup> My point here is that fun is inessential to ritual. Rituals *can* be fun (e.g., weddings, coming of age ceremonies, drinking ceremonies, etc.), but it is not essential to our account of ritual that they be fun.

<sup>205</sup> I add that the affective feature is supposed to be promoral, since it might be noted that making games "fun" in itself denotes an affective feature of gameplay and game design.

affective engagement one might have via social rituals and the simulated engagement.

This may partially be due to the aforementioned issue of the contingent and distinct reality created with the lusory environment: one's actions and character in a game need not be continuous with actions and character outside of a game; accordingly, this may have an effect on the manner in which players perform.<sup>206</sup> As a result, we should be unsurprised if and when game players do not react or interact in ways that we would call realistic (i.e., in ways that we would expect them to behave were it *not* a game situation). For this reason, the stakes of the game differ significantly from the stakes in which one is supposed to accord with ritual and may elicit particular behaviors and attitudes from players only when in the game situation. Ritual, in contrast, pervades environments in which games are often absent and, as part of the socialization process, demands learner attention *and* full participation (including affective engagement) in all instances of social interaction, thus demarcating another important distinction between games and rituals.

Perhaps this difference is best reflected with regard to the difference in gravity afforded to the practices of rituals and games. Recall from the third and fourth chapters that a sense of respect (or even reverence) is prescribed by ritual: one is to take the ritual seriously in enacting it and, perhaps barring scenarios where rigid adherence to the ritual conflicts with the greater social harmony, one is expected to maintain this serious attitude both during the performance and with regard to potential future performances. This is at least partly because the ritual is continuous with the rest of one's sociomoral life. Games,

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<sup>206</sup> Again, one might bring up cases of rituals involving role-play as also being discontinuous from one's regular character. The key point here is that, in those cases, the distinction between the role played and one's regular character is itself prescribed within the ritual (i.e., it is necessary that one adopt a certain role for certain performances), and that this distinction is in the service of particular psychosocial needs. Such is not the case for games in general, hence the qualifier of "need not be."

however, are discontinuous from the rest of the social world by their very definition. Although the gaming environment is intended to be one of fun, it is not the case that playing the game necessitates an attitude of respect or an atmosphere of gravitas. One can be careless in a gaming scenario and incur no “real world” consequences; the same is not so in cases of practicing ritual. Moreover, to take a game (too) seriously is often construed as problematic, a mark of immaturity, or even irrational (e.g., being a spoilsport or sore loser, carrying a grudge outside the field of play, valuing winning the game over the health of one’s relationships, etc.).<sup>207</sup> The presence (or absence) of such attitudes of respect and/or reverence, then, marks an added distinction between rituals and games.

To summarize: while I suggest that games may be a useful resource for education in general and share some features with ritual, the two tools still perform distinct functions in different ways. Games can provide simulations of moral experiences, but there may always be a gap between simulated and genuine moral experiences.<sup>208</sup> Ritual, on the other hand, is typically designed specifically to elicit certain behavioral and emotional reactions, and (arguably) maintains a more direct degree of continuity with the social world.

#### 6.2.4 *Etiquette*

Etiquette is the final tool that I will address, and the most difficult to distinguish from ritual. This should not be surprising: in Confucianism, rituals encompass

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<sup>207</sup> Of course, a similar concern does exist for ritual, and the Confucians were aware of this. Being overly fastidious with regard to the details of ritual can detract from one’s ability to function in a genuinely promoral, prosocial manner. As noted in Confucius’s *Analects*: “When material substance exceeds cultivation, there is crude rusticity; when cultivation exceeds material substance, there is pedantry. When cultivation and material substance are equally developed, then there is a gentleman” (6.18/13/21).

<sup>208</sup> A gap that can be exacerbated by the fact that games are typically oriented (at least partly) around having fun, as well as whether the game is sufficient to consistently elicit and condition promoral responses.

prescriptions for conveying respect and related attitudes. Such an account, however, also seems to cover practices of etiquette and general good manners (e.g., keeping one's elbows off of the table, not wearing hats indoors, etc.). Such practices are shows of good upbringing and, as such, might be thought of as resources for conveying a respectful, or at least civil, demeanor. The Confucians would likely be content to include such practices under the banner of ritual, but this may pose a problem for modern audiences: ritual is supposed to be a moral undertaking, but etiquette is not *necessarily* a moral project.<sup>209</sup> Even on my abstracted account of ritual, it may be unclear whether etiquette and ritual are distinct since both are engaged in the project of prescribing and guiding behaviors such that one expresses respect. What is more, particular prescriptions of etiquette are often regarded as matters of custom or convention, and ritual is supposedly distinct from these notions.

Before proceeding, it will be helpful to draw a distinction between etiquette, as systems of rules unto themselves, and the principles of manners that ground them. This distinction, made in the philosophical literature by Karen Stohr (2006),<sup>210</sup> emphasizes that shows of good manners are expressions of moral principles, and that one displays good manners via etiquette. Stohr provides the following example:

In American culture, addressing a stranger by her title and last name rather than by her first name, shaking her hand upon introduction, and meeting her eyes when speaking to her are all ways of expressing respect for her. In using these forms, I convey a moral attitude about someone in a way that will be understood by her and by others who witness the exchange. Likewise, by deliberately refraining from using the standard forms of

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<sup>209</sup> I emphasize “necessarily” here because it is unclear whether etiquette’s distinction from morality is well-founded and may be merely a product of Western prejudice. As noted in the third chapter, some Confucians, such as Xunzi, *do* adopt etiquette under the umbrella of ritual and regard its deployment as part of a moral lifestyle. A common perspective among Western thinkers, however, is that morality is necessarily universally binding, whereas etiquette is not. Such arguments, however, may be contentious.

<sup>210</sup> Stohr’s own distinction follows one established by Judith Martin (known to many as “Miss Manners”). See in particular Martin (1996, 29-30).



greeting, I can express moral disapproval or indignation. (193)

The displays under examination (mode of address, shaking hands, making eye contact) are all conventional; they are prescribed by *etiquette*. In endeavoring to follow through on these displays, one is showing good *manners*.

Yet manners and etiquette may come apart: two cultures may share notions of good manners in offering respectful greetings, but may have very different conventions (rules of etiquette) for how to display such principles. We would not say, for example, that bowing as opposed to shaking hands represents a different collection of principles for manners; it is a difference in systems of etiquette. Additionally, and unfortunately, one might also employ the rules of etiquette for unmannerly ends (e.g., the use of complicated eating utensils with which a guest may be unfamiliar so as to emphasize distinctions in social class) (Stohr 2006, 194). Of course, it is arguable that such displays are not shows of etiquette at all (or at least not *good* etiquette), but it does help to reinforce the distinction between the rules of etiquette and principles of manners.

Having said this, it should be clear that etiquette may at times fall under the purview of ritual insofar as it provides a means of comporting oneself. Etiquette *can* be used to express attitudes, including promoral ones, and it does prescribe ways of behaving in much the same way that ritual does. One thing that ritual requires on my account that the exercise of etiquette need not, however, is an affective component.<sup>211</sup> To reuse the previous example: when one is performing the burial rites for a parent, one is *supposed* to be

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<sup>211</sup> This seems to be a distinction that other scholars have employed as well. Joseph P. Santamaria and David A. Rosenbaum (2011), who have provided some of the only research on the deployment of etiquette, treat such practices as mere “physical acts” used for signaling purposes, and need not be accompanied by any particular affective states (584). Sarah Buss (1999) makes a similar point regarding how etiquette serves as a vehicle for displaying moral attitudes, although Buss at times fluctuates between appeal to manners and etiquette in her project (see in particular footnote 2 on page 796 for clarification on this point).

experiencing feelings of loss and remembrance; when one is keeping one's elbows off of the table, it is supposed to be a show of respect for the host and other diners, but etiquette itself does not insist that one should hold some affective state to follow etiquette. This is not to suggest, of course, that in following etiquette one cannot also feel respect for others, nor is the suggestion that one will always have the expected feelings when enacting ritual. One can feel gracious toward one's host and, as previously mentioned, rituals can be performed with varying degrees of quality and emotion (in fact, such would need to be the case if ritual is to be teachable). The point is simply that etiquette need not include an affect-guiding/generating component whereas ritual does.

This point can be drawn out even further. Over the course of my project, I have emphasized that rituals are (at least to some degree) flexible: despite traditional prescriptions, circumstances might become such that the ritual can be altered. The guideline here is that rituals are intended to convey certain attitudes, and this constrains how flexible one can be in altering the ritual: if the alterations are such that the concordant feelings are no longer embodied and expressed, then one has gone too far.

Zilu said, "How calamitous is poverty! When the parents are alive, one cannot support them; when the parents die, one cannot afford them the [burial] rites."

Confucius said, "If one can satisfy one's parents with only bean soup to eat and water to drink, then it may be called filial piety. If one's means can afford only wrapping the body from head to foot and interring it without an outer coffin, then it may be considered ritual." (*Li Ji* 4.35/26/13-4)<sup>212</sup>

Thus, ritual may be approximated and still said to be successful in virtue of how well-suited it is to context, and how effectively it conveys the sentiment.

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<sup>212</sup> Original text: 子路曰：“傷哉貧也！生無以為養死；無以為禮也！”孔子曰：“啜菽飲水盡其歡斯之謂孝。斂首足形還葬而無槨稱其財斯之謂禮。”

In contrast, etiquette can be said to be structured around decorum rather than promoral attitudes. It is not clear, for example, that the precise placement of silverware at a dining party has anything to do with the conveyance and embodiment of affective states; at most, it seems to be a practical and/or aesthetic concern. To violate this practice of silverware placement, while perhaps a show of poor upbringing, does not *in and of itself* demonstrate disrespect.<sup>213</sup> The stakes of performances in etiquette, then, are substantially different from those in ritual performances.

Again, it is worth noting that there may be occurrences in which etiquette and ritual overlap: in those situations where deploying proper etiquette is part of expressing respect, acting in accord with etiquette may be incorporated into the practice of ritual. Even so, it is not the case that either etiquette or ritual is reducible to the other in the account on offer, since the aforementioned differences distinguish ritual's role from that of etiquette.

### 6.3 Is ritual counterproductive for moral education?

It is plausible, then, that ritual can perform a distinct function in moral education. It is a separate question, however, as to whether we *should* utilize ritual as a resource. Although I discussed how ritual fits with a Vygotskian educational approach and argued ritual fits with empirical findings, one might still be concerned that ritual might be such a foreign concept to many contemporary, liberal societies that introducing it as an educational tool could actually be *counterproductive* to moral instruction. Such a concern might develop along two basic lines. First, if using ritual to bolster moral education would require learners to engage with and learn an additional sociocultural tool, then it might

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<sup>213</sup> It can, of course, if it is done knowingly and intentionally, but that is a particular case.

require us to expend time and resources that we could retain by utilizing other tools (e.g., those mentioned in the previous section). Second, if rituals are typically culturally particular forms, then one might think that a ritually oriented system could actually make it more difficult for individuals from different cultures to interact.

These are practical concerns and, although I contend that the ritual approach to moral education can ultimately accommodate them, they are deserving of consideration. Let us begin by attending to the worry that ritual might be an unnecessary addition to our toolkit for moral education. In the previous section, I argued that the function of ritual in a moral education context is distinct from other tools on offer; moreover, it is arguable that even if the aforementioned tools were to be utilized in concert with one another, ritual could still make a distinct contribution functionally speaking. Despite this argument, one might think that the cost of adding ritual to our collection of tools outweighs whatever distinct contributions ritual can make: the amount of time, resources, and energy that would need to be allocated to learn (from) yet another tool simply cannot be justified. It would be more expedient to rely on tools with which learners are already familiar (e.g., stories, games, etc.) and appropriate them for the particular enterprise of moral education.

I could continue to argue the merits of ritual's contributions, but I feel that would be belaboring a point that I have been making throughout the project. Instead, I will respond to this concern by arguing that ritual is *not* such a foreign tool that it would be overly demanding of learners or, for that matter, instructors. If I am successful in this argument, then contentions that ritual may be counterproductive to moral development because it is either not crucial to sociomoral living or simply too foreign of a concept to be worth adding to our repertoire of tools will be severely weakened (if not outright dismissible).

I begin with the following line of concern: rituals might provide a valuable social tool for moral education in communities in which ritual is already salient and crucial; in nonritualistic communities, however, ritual will have a diminished role and, therefore, be a weaker tool. For example, ritual might be a very useful tool for moral education in Confucian cultures, wherein ritual is already a mainstay of the tradition, but less so in the United States, wherein ritual is largely construed exclusively as part of religious practice.

While this line already cedes some viability to ritual from the outset, my purpose is to argue that ritual can be a useful tool for moral education in *all* cultures; I should take it seriously. I could seek to rebut this worry by pointing out that the conception of ritual at play in my project (i.e., ritual as prescriptions) covers a multitude of practices. This means that common gestures such as handshakes and holding doors open for others can also count as rituals, since they are behaviors/actions that can be ritualized in the relevant sense in order to fall under the purview of the account.<sup>214</sup> Therefore, rituals *are* pervasive even in cultures that do not explicitly regard them as such and, thus, are not entirely foreign tools.

The objector might persist, however, that such actions are minor to the point of not being genuine rituals. This fits with a larger claim that a large part of modern culture has apparently been deritualized: it may have been the case for the early Confucians that ritual played a large part in the conveyance of dispositions both at court and during more mundane daily interactions, but this is arguably no longer the norm. Human interactions in modernity are considerably more relaxed and less detail-oriented. Discussion of ritual has been largely relegated to religious and anthropological practices and policies; it receives

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<sup>214</sup> Recall my earlier claim that things such as etiquette and customs can be part of ritual insofar as they may be used toward the end of demonstrating promoral attitudes such as respect.

little to no mention outside of these circles. Despite ritual's apparent absence, however, humans have continued to flourish and advance as a species. If ritual is integral to the morality of a society, and a society's morality is necessary for its general wellbeing, then one would expect said society to fall apart without ritual. If the assumption that society has become increasingly deritualized is accurate, however, then we have reason to doubt that ritual is conducive to a society's moral flourishing. What is more, this might even be taken as evidence for an opposing claim: society has become increasingly deritualized because (at least particular) rituals are *damaging* to a society's wellbeing.

The concern as articulated poses a challenge to my proritual account in two ways. First, the concern suggests that deritualization has been a good thing (or at least not a bad thing), whereas the moral education framework I am endorsing recommends increasing the focus on and use of ritual as a resource for inculcating promoral dispositions. Second, it suggests that ritual may actually be a social harm rather than a social good; this stands in direct contrast with my position that properly utilized ritual can improve morality within a community. In order to respond to this concern, then, it will be helpful to argue that ritual's presence has not declined (or, at the very least, that many rituals have become less elaborate) and that ritual is beneficial rather than detrimental to the health of a society.

There are several reasons to resist the conclusion that ritual's presence in society has declined, perhaps foremost being the fact that, although many cultures are moving away from *elaborateness* in typical social interactions, they are not outright rejecting *ritual* in the sense that I have developed. On the contrary, ritual is an inextricable feature of society given the essential function that it plays in facilitating harmonious interactions. Recall that I have defined rituals simply as communal prescriptions for actions that express

respect and related attitudes. That communities have such prescriptions is arguably integral to their sustainability: in the absence of established norms for respectful exchanges, it is unclear how well the individuals making up a community will be able to interact with one another in manners that are reliably respectful and conducive to overall social harmony.

It is important to note that these prescriptions need not call for elaborate ceremony to be effective. In addition to the common practices of handshaking and other greeting rituals, there are a number of extant practices that fall into my account of ritual. Weddings and funerals are both special occasions that entail a number of expectations based largely upon their respective natures. Weddings are typically considered joyful events, and so participants are expected to maintain at least a basic level of decorum at and respect for the activity. Even in a minimal, secular setting such as a courtroom, the individuals to be married must stand before an official and some witnesses so that their union may be legitimized in the eyes of the community. Similarly, funerals are events in which recognition is given regarding the extinction of life, and so certain attitudes are expected of attendees at such events as well. The precise content and form of weddings and funerals may vary from culture to culture; nonetheless, these *types* of events, these rituals, all place expectations upon those who take part in them and require said attendants to respect the events and those involved for what and who they are.

This degree of commitment, however, is not much to ask of participants (at least in comparison to hyper-formalized, ornate ceremonies), and it is arguably already widely accepted and practiced among even the least ceremony-oriented of people. For example, consider the practice of celebratory drinking. This practice may at first seem a matter of custom rather than ritual, as there are many ways to go about celebrating and many things

to celebrate. Celebrating achievements, however, can be construed as a ritual insofar as it connotes a kind of respect and camaraderie among participants. Note also that celebratory drinking may be a more or less elaborate practice: it can be done at home or at a special location; it can be an elaborate or inexpensive affair; it can include song or more ornate features, or it can simply be buying a single beer for a friend. It is also widely practiced in cultures permitting consumption of alcoholic beverages, including those that may not otherwise give much mind to formality.

Further examples are the rituals already present within classrooms. Many of the practices involved in classroom structuring are rituals or at least ritual-like. It is common in many cultures for the instructor to announce the beginning of class; students take this initiation as a cue to become attentive and to present themselves as such. In some classes, it is even customary for the teacher to offer a greeting to the class and for the students to reply in turn (e.g., “Good morning, class.” “Good morning, teacher.”). Such arrangements are effectively appropriations of traditional call-and-response rituals that are used in places of worship (e.g., “The Lord be with you.” “And also with you.”). They are used to organize in-school interactions between instructors and students, establishing expectations for the student-teacher dynamic. First and foremost, they establish a respectful relationship between teacher and students and also among students themselves insofar as they provide an order to the classroom and help to cement the purpose of the class and the relationships between its various occupants. Other practices also contribute to these respectful expectations, including the raising of hands to answer questions, seating arrangements, and even queuing (which, of course, are not limited to the classroom or schools, but appear in abundance therein). Again, these practices may be more or less ornate, but their



pervasiveness suggests that they are useful and accepted. To summarize the point: what I am suggesting here is that it is not *ritual* that has substantially declined in our communities, but rather degrees of *ornateness* that have been reduced.<sup>215</sup>

I add the qualifier “substantially” because, from a statistical point of view, it is arguable that the number of rituals being performed has declined.<sup>216</sup> This decline, however, can be traced to the fact that particular rituals, especially religious rituals, see less practice as fewer individuals compose the relevant populations. Additionally, much of Western society has moved away from complex social hierarchies and more toward egalitarianism. As a result, many of the social divisions marking out class boundaries have disappeared; with them have gone the rituals. Once common deferential gestures such as bowing are now reserved for very particular occasions. Such gestures are instantiations of ritual but, like the notion of deference behind it, it is not commonly observed in the Western world.

Nonetheless, simply because *some* rituals have fallen by the wayside does not mean that human social life is no longer highly ritualized. In fact, it can be argued that *different* rituals have arisen to fill the gaps left when the older rituals were phased out. Indeed, one might even argue that many rituals in the United States can be characterized by their casual and informal nature (e.g., seeking to be on a first name basis with one’s workmates). For example, while at one time it may have been appropriate to bow or kneel before one’s

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<sup>215</sup> Even this requires qualification: in many locations, ceremonies such as weddings have become increasingly ornate among those capable of affording such measures. Indeed, lavish weddings, burials, anniversaries, birthdays, and other such celebrations have become quite popular among the wealthy. Of course, one might note that such extravagance is superfluous: the ritual could still be conducted without the rental of a dozen white horses. Regardless of how one takes these observations, however, the main point I hope to make is that, in many instances, rituals have become less formalized and less ornate.

<sup>216</sup> It is, of course, impossible to know for certain whether this is a factual claim. I suspect it is at least plausible, though, with regard to *variety* of rituals (e.g., as there are fewer religious groups, there will be fewer instantiations of their group-specific rituals).

superior in a place of business, the positions of supervisor and subordinate are now not perceived as being so distant in terms of due shows of respect. As such, a new ritual, shaking hands while making eye contact, might be construed as a replacement, more egalitarian ritual that supplants the old, hierarchically based one. Even in societies that are less ornate and less hierarchical, then, ritual can (and does) play an important role.

The second aspect of the concern, that ritual is somehow deleterious to society, is also a conclusion of which one should be wary. Recall that the initial assumption was that human society has flourished despite the decline of ritual; on this assumption, it was reasonable to assume that ritual might have in some way been holding society back. I have just given reason to be skeptical of the assertion that the presence of ritual in society has substantially decreased, however, so we should regard this follow-up conclusion as dubious. If ritual has not declined and society has continued to flourish, then it is at least possible that ritual is conducive to the health of society. Additionally, over the course of this project, I have provided empirical support for the idea that rituals, at least if employed in a certain way, can enhance the development of dispositions that are or are related to promoral thought and action. This should lend further credence to the idea that ritual is not a detriment to society but a beneficial resource. Of course, there are certain qualifications that should be made here: obviously, ritual (like any tool) can be put in the service of harmful ends (e.g., be structured to systematically oppress certain groups/individuals, be overly demanding upon one's resources, be manipulated for the purpose of deceiving others, etc.); it also does look like there might be an argument to be made for ensuring that the rituals are not themselves too taxing in terms of the demands they place upon practitioners (which might explain the reduction in ornateness of rituals). These

qualifications, however, do not diminish the potential viability of ritual as presented.

Another worry deals with cross-cultural compatibility of ritual: even if we accept that all communities utilize rituals, it does not follow that the sets of rituals used by different communities will be the same or even largely similar to one another. In some ways, this concern is reminiscent of an issue raised for moral education in general, namely that advocates of moral education may presuppose that a particular collection of teachable moral values are universal. As Christopher, Nelson, and Nelson (2003) point out

If the virtues are *not universal*, then character education will necessarily amount to a privileging of particular moral visions or particular cultural ideals concerning what is a good or mature person, and will conflict sharply with the anti-authoritarianism and emancipatory ethos of American society. However, to proclaim them *as universal* seems to many people to be presumptuous as well, and to run afoul of that same profoundly antiauthoritarian sensibility. The danger is that under the guise of universality is a particular view of the good life and justice that is not embraced by many different cultures past and present. (85)<sup>217</sup>

Furthermore, even if a collection of values is universal, it does not follow that all cultures will weight them equally (92). For example, caring displays are common in many cultures, but the manner in which general care is weighted alongside other values may differ from place to place. This can lead to the development of moral tensions between cultures that have disparate value systems. Similarly, if rituals vary greatly between communities, then this might inhibit harmonious interactions between members of different communities.

Could an appeal to ritual as a tool for moral development complicate intercultural exchanges with regard to moral issues? There are two aspects of this concern. The first has to do with the different *forms* that the rituals might take: as with languages, one role that rituals play is communicative and, if people do not speak the same language, then they will

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<sup>217</sup> David Wong (2006) makes a similar point.

have difficulty communicating; similarly, if ritual forms are wildly different from culture to culture, then their communicative function will also be inhibited.<sup>218</sup> This breakdown is further complicated for ritual because of its normative moral function: since rituals prescribe what you are supposed to do, if rituals are unintelligible (or conflicting) between communities, then there might be a problem with using ritual as a basis for moral education.

The other side of the worry has to do with the dispositions associated with the rituals themselves. Recall that one of the purposes of ritual is to make certain notions, such as respect, more concrete for learners by associating them with forms of behavior and scenarios. While respect remains a general notion in the sense that it is an attitude that learners are encouraged to feel toward (at least a subset of) other beings, the associative process might place certain limitations and exclusions on what gets counted as a show of respect and when it is appropriate to deploy respectful attitudes. To use an analogy, think of tetherball, wherein a ball is connected to a post by a rope usually about one-and-a-half to two meters in length. The ball can be moved anywhere around the post, but only as far as the rope extends. The implication for attitudes like respect is that they might be able to be pulled away from the respective rituals to a certain extent, but the moral thinker will likely be tethered to the ritual as a paradigmatic form of said attitude. If the forms of ritual are sufficiently different between two cultures, then the cultures may be incapable of interpreting or accepting each other's rituals or even maintaining notions of respect (or other attitudes) that are compatible with one another.

Regarding the first aspect of the problem, it is important to separate the issue faced by particular sets of rituals from the notion of ritual in general. It is obvious that different

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<sup>218</sup> Curiously, nobody objects to teaching language for such reasons.

cultures can and do develop different ritual forms, and these forms, much like languages, may vary so wildly as to be unintelligible to the uninitiated. A lack of understanding of one another's culturally distinct rituals can lead to moral tensions just as a lack of understanding one another's language can lead to difficulties in communication. No one, however, would reasonably object that simply because different cultures have different languages means that language *itself* is the source of communicative difficulties; the difficulties arise because the language-*users* cannot translate between one another in a way that promotes discourse. Similarly, it is not a defect of ritual *per se* that different communities may adopt different rituals. For one, such an event may not even transpire: one community may just as easily adopt the same, similar, or compatible sets of rituals as others. This is to say that it is not an inherent feature of ritual that rituals *must* differ from culture to culture. Second, as with language, even when rituals differ in form between communities, they are still providing the same function (i.e., moral prescriptions). This means that the ritual systems, as with most languages, should be accessible enough that one can learn to *translate* and/or *transition* between different ritual programs.<sup>219</sup> If anything, appeal to ritual (as a general notion) may very well help in alleviating or clarifying moral tensions between cultures by enabling those involved to come to a shared understanding of the issues and values at stake.

These points tie into the second part of the problem: not only will rituals be serving the same function among cultures, but cultures will also need to develop rituals for many of the same sorts of interactions and events. This is because humans as a species are sufficiently similar in terms of both their biology and shared history that we should expect the same general sorts of events to appear across cultures and require (or be greatly assisted

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<sup>219</sup> Thanks to Eric Hutton for suggesting these two points.

by) rituals. Meeting others is common, and so there are rituals of meeting; death is common, and so there are funerary rites; partnering is common, and so there are nuptials; successes and failures are common, and so there are looser or tighter prescriptions for these depending upon their gravity. This means that, while the exact ritual forms will likely vary from culture to culture, most cultures will have in common at least basic libraries of ritual.<sup>220</sup> If this assumption is accurate, then this is good news for the tethering worry: the fact that there will be formal overlap increases the likelihood of there being content (i.e., dispositional) overlap with rituals as well, and this means that it is likely that members of different cultures will at least have the potential to recognize similarities in one another's rituals and understandings of attitudes such as respect.

I have argued extensively, then, that ritual plays a rather crucial function in most cultures. This secures ritual's place as an accessible sociocultural tool, but it might not compel the hardline skeptic that ritualized education is good for moral development. Rituals, the skeptic could argue, might be sufficient to coax members of a community to go through certain motions, but they may not be sufficient to develop genuine moral agents (i.e., agents who think in moral rather than merely practical or strategic terms). Ritual, it might be thought, is capable of providing learners with forms, but it might not be capable of ensuring that those forms elicit promoral dispositions. In fact, it may even lead to nonmoral understandings of ritual. Here is an interesting test case: learners, rather than use rituals as a means of comprehending and expressing promoral dispositions, might instead aestheticize morally charged circumstances and the concurrent emotions to the point that

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<sup>220</sup> Aside from the obvious example of the *Li Ji*, we also have access to religious ritual compendia covering things such as the Brahmanic rituals of the *Vedas*, sacraments of Catholicism, and Jewish rituals described within the *Torah*.

they no longer *experience* feelings of empathy, grief, joy, etc., and instead merely *act them out*.<sup>221</sup> For example, at the funeral ceremony, one who is raised in the context of ritual comes to identify the ceremony as an aesthetic performance *in place of* an emotional one. As such, at the funeral ceremony one is not engaging in grief but, rather, appreciation of the form of the ritual. Pushed to its extreme, the case suggests that all moral features structured by ritual could be subject to this same phenomenon. Morality, then, would no longer a matter of thinking and feeling but, rather, about completing an art form.

It is worth reemphasizing here that I am not defending the claim that ritual is the sole tool to be used for moral development; there are other resources that can and should be utilized as well. Among the most important of these resources are the teachers of ritual, be they family, professional educators, or otherwise. The Confucians themselves were very much aware of the difficulties that can be encountered if one attempts to learn and practice ritual in isolation. Xunzi writes extensively on the importance of drawing near proper teachers, as such individuals can be used as role models.<sup>222</sup> In turning to such individuals for guidance, one is not supplanting ritual education with role modeling, because the two are not mutually exclusive. Rather, a large part of what the teacher models is the proper deployment of ritual; this is done alongside explanations that provide learners with a deeper understanding of the nature of a particular ritual as well as the circumstances that should give rise to its being exercised.<sup>223</sup> We can adopt this policy regarding teachers into our

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<sup>221</sup> My thanks to Elijah Millgram for raising this concern.

<sup>222</sup> For example: “Ritual is that by which to correct your person. The teacher is that by which to correct your practice of ritual. If you are without ritual, then how will you correct your person? If you are without a teacher, how will you know that your practice of ritual is right?” (*Xunzi* 2/8/1).

<sup>223</sup> This might also assuage some concerns about the use of role modeling in education, particularly in terms of ensuring learners follow the example set by instructors. As Wouter Sanderse (2000) notes, at least among adolescents, role modeling is typically not effective as a method of instruction on its own. By

abstracted notion of ritual education as well. By doing so, we are given an additional resource that *can* help learners to connect ritual prescriptions with promoral dispositions, leading to the idealized circumstances of connecting said dispositions with rituals.

At this point, the skeptic could persist: simply because we have teachers, perhaps even compelling teachers, does not mean that all of the learners will necessarily *moralize* the rituals; they could still *merely aestheticize* or even *strategize* the rituals instead. Put simply, they might not affectively engage with the rituals and remain emotionally detached. I answer: they certainly could, but this is unlikely. A collection of empirical studies presented child subjects with hypothetical scenarios in which one agent is victimized by another. The subjects were asked what feelings they attributed to the victimizers in these cases. In the cases where the victimizer was hypothetical, subjects (aged six and older) provided negative-to-mixed emotional attributions; when the victimizer was the reporting subject him- or herself, the emotional attributions were overwhelmingly negative (Malti and Ongley 2014, 170-1). Since a greater degree of negative emotional attribution was taken to reflect stronger empathic responses, this finding suggests that the more personalized the scenario, the more likely it is to elicit an empathic (and, insofar as empathy is related to reliable moral performance, promoral) response and the less likely that the subject will be (or remain) detached. A further takeaway is that, for most humans, it is probable that the ritual educational framework will be effective in eliciting and inculcating promoral reactions. This is because, as noted previously, ritual prescriptions require adherents to engage in substantive, nonabstract behaviors and actions that place them in

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providing explanation and elaboration, however, students are more likely to commit to the principles being introduced.



the midst of morally charged scenarios such that the adherents must engage with the context, making the situation personal. As noted in the same chapter, the more personal (or personalized) the interaction, the more likely it is to elicit empathetic and other promoral responses. It is highly unlikely that the subject will be emotionally detached. Accordingly, we have good reason to suspect that ritual will be successful in eliciting these promoral responses, rather than merely aesthetic, detached ones. There may, of course, be outliers, but this is a problem that any approach to education faces, and it is incumbent upon any of us in the position of educator to be aware of such individuals and attempt to better tailor a program for them. What is important for this particular resource (i.e., ritual) is that there is good empirical support for the idea that it can be effectively used as a tool for moral education in the majority of cases.

This line of explanation also provides a means of heading off another concern regarding moral education via ritual, namely that ritual might do little more than produce inflexible, protocol-obsessed robots. Here is how the concern might run: If rituals are the tools by which we help moral learners structure their interactions with others, then what happens in circumstances that might deviate in structure from the typical ritual context, or that might be wholly novel and unrelated to the ritual contexts? If ritual is shaping moral judgment, then might it not make said judgment overly rigid?

This may well be possible but, again, it is important to emphasize that my argument here is not that ritual is the sole resource to be used in moral education, but simply a useful one among several.<sup>224</sup> Just as teachers need rituals to provide concrete demonstrations for

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<sup>224</sup> In fact, if this objection is to be construed as a reason to abandon ritual, then there is a problem, for there is no reason to think that this concern might not apply to any other form of moral education as well.

learners, the rituals also require capable teachers to help explicate them in such a manner that they are not construed by learners as rigid constraints on behavior and judgment. One thing that teachers should do is encourage students to reflect upon the rituals themselves, their application, and their meaningfulness. By doing this, teachers should be able to help learners develop further develop relevant promoral capacities that can, in concert with the rituals themselves, lead to reliable moral performance. The Confucians, for example, focus upon a notion of *yi*, commonly rendered in English as “righteousness,” which also helps to guide ritual practice. This virtue, along with quality instructors, reflection, and the rituals themselves, are all key components in developing morally competent persons. It is not unreasonable to assume that the contemporary model of ritual education can also make use of a combination of resources, and not merely ritual, to ensure learners are sufficiently morally savvy to be able to deploy ritual with necessary flexibility.

One might be concerned that this response leaves ritual open to a vulnerability: If part of the program’s efficacy hinges upon learner reflection, and learners might have different interpretations of some of the rituals, then what ensures that the program will produce learner practitioners that share a moral outlook? The worry here is that the ritual-based program may simply lead to learner practitioners, despite having the same ritual forms, deviating wildly from one another in terms of their understandings of morality, sometimes in directions that are seemingly antithetical to the intended moral program.

This concern actually shares features with some of the other worries previously raised, particularly those regarding the viability of the ritual program as a resource for

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Taken to its logical extreme, the objection serves as a reason to abandon *any* form of moral education, but this outcome would be problematic for what are, hopefully, obvious reasons.

inculcating moral dispositions (as opposed to a nonmoral construal of ritual) and the matter of the various forms that rituals might take across cultures (or, in this case, within a culture). In both of these cases, I suggested that, from a statistical perspective, the problems raised were unlikely to cause difficulties for the ritual program on a significant level. In the former case, I suggested that humans are (typically) prone to empathize when prompted to do so, meaning that it is likely that ritual can be successful for inculcating promoral dispositions. In the latter case, I suggested that given both the nature of ritual's functionality and human psychosocial tendencies, the worry about cross-cultural tensions arising over differing ritual forms is overstated. I suspect that, in the case of ritual learners, we will see a related occurrence: given the fact that the learners will all be studying the *same* ritual forms, and also be coming from the *same* community, it is unlikely that they will develop moral understandings that are so wildly different as to be incompatible with one another (and, of course, those who do will be in the minority).

This is not to suggest that learners will demonstrate invariability of understanding; some variability should be expected, and it may even be the case that some learners develop substantially different systems of moral valuation.<sup>225</sup> The aim of the project is not to establish total moral consensus within a population; such an objective (if even desirable) is unrealistic and likely beyond the ability of any moral program.<sup>226</sup> What is important, however, is that they have common ground in their conceptions of morality, at least in terms of their modes of expression (i.e., rituals); otherwise they will be incapable of co-functioning despite their disagreements. That is the main aim of the ritual program: to

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<sup>225</sup> Consider how some tend toward deontological ethics while others tend toward consequentialism.

<sup>226</sup> Ironically, the Confucians *did* believe in this possibility, marking another point of divergence between my account and the ones articulated in the Confucian tradition.

inculcate and make comprehensible moral dispositions within and between communities. This seems to be a plausible goal for the ritual program, and I think it also minimizes the concern regarding disparate moral outlooks and, in turn, the counterproductivity of ritual.

#### 6.4 Ritual's efficacy

Even if one is compelled by remarks in the previous sections, one might still hold the following worry: nothing has been presented so far that *proves* ritual's efficacy as a moral education tool. None of the empirical data that I have provided thus far has evaluated ritual's effect on learner development in general, let alone moral development in particular. Is there any *direct* empirical support for the claims that I have made thus far?

At present, we have yet to conduct a study of how ritual influences moral development. As a result, I cannot in good conscience lay claim to direct empirical support for the position that I have offered over the course of this project. What we need is to actually develop a ritualized program of moral education and study how well it fares for helping learners to develop good moral character, habits, judgment, etc. Despite the absence of direct support, however, I encourage my readers to be realistically optimistic. Ritual *does* fit well (if not perfectly) with the Vygotskian model of learning and development, and the Vygotskian model has received increasing support from the cognitive sciences and endorsement from the educational sciences. We know that sociocultural tools play an important role in learner development, and we know that ritual is an archetypical sociocultural tool. This alone should give us reason to consider ritual to at least be a plausible resource for moral development.

Nonetheless, one might still be concerned that ritual might ultimately prove inefficacious: that particular instructional methods will not be effective across all cases is

a well-known phenomenon in human learning; we should expect some learners to be less-disposed or less-interested in some material and instructional methods than others. Over the course of this project, I have suggested that ritual might be particularly effective for a number of reasons, not the least of which being its accessibility and ubiquity. At this point, however, it is important to note that simply because there is reason to think that ritual might be a highly effective tool in moral education, it cannot solve all problems an educator might face. This final section is dedicated toward elucidating the limits of a ritual program in moral education while still demonstrating that the program is hopeful. In particular, I will focus on the issue of learner obstinacy and how ritual may (or may not) overcome it.

The concern over learner obstinacy, or resistance (conscious or unconscious) to the effects of ritual, pertains to the fact that most of the evidence that I have provided in support of ritual has so far drawn solely upon childhood and early adolescence studies. Since ritual and moral education ideally begin at a young age, one might be concerned that the positive effects of a moral education program in ritual might diminish, or simply be nonexistent, for older learners, particularly adults. It is well known that the capacity for learning certain skills waxes and wanes during certain periods of development. Language acquisition is a prime example: Elissa Newport (1989, 1990) has written extensively on the constraints that psychosocial maturation places upon language learning. According to two studies by Newport, nonnative learners of a given language exhibit difficulties in effectively comprehending and deploying a new language, and these difficulties are likely age-related: learners who take up a second language (roughly) after the age of seventeen demonstrated consistently poorer performance than their younger counterparts (Johnson and Newport 1989, 81; Newport 1990, 20). Given the fact that the decrease in performance seems to

occur around a specific age range and that this decrease appears to be linked to particular sorts of errors made repeatedly, Newport and colleagues suggest that this provides evidence for the assumption that (optimal) language learning occurs within a specific window in cognitive development, and any learner attempting to develop competence in a language outside this window may face difficulty, possibly because these later learners either do not have the same faculties for acquiring language as their younger counterparts or are simply unable to learn language in the same way.

This has led some researchers to follow Newport in adopting a “less is more” hypothesis of language development, suggesting that young children typically have less trouble developing language competence because their cognitive capacities (e.g., conceptualization) are less developed. As a result, young children are forced to rely on less developed capacities, and this allows them to acquire and integrate elements of language in a piecemeal fashion that ultimately makes for easier language development than in their adult counterparts, who rely upon higher level conceptualization (Newport 1990, 24). In short, conceptualization might actually get in the way of acquiring a language. So it might be the case that being a better “absorber” will make it easier for one to develop a language, and humans are typically at their most absorbent at some phase in childhood. The special case of language, then, is that it is easier to acquire certain basic components in one’s youth, despite needing to develop further theoretical competence over the course of one’s life.

There is an analogous concern for moral education via ritual: if sociomoral development must occur within a particular developmental window in order to have an optimal effect, then it is questionable whether ritual training will substantially improve the

moral competence of an individual who is outside of said window.<sup>227</sup> On the one hand, this concern seems to hit the mark: if it is the case that humans become less receptive to rituals as a resource for developing promoral dispositions with age, then this does mark a weakness of ritual. On the other hand, though, it is worth questioning whether ritual fares any worse than other approaches to moral education with regard to its ability to reach adults: if moral competence is limited to a developmental window, then the concern applies to moral education *writ large* and is not just a problem for ritual. This would mean that ritual is no worse off than any other teaching resource for moral development.

Furthermore, the very comparison between moral development and learning a second language outside of a developmental window is quite telling: just because learning a second language later in life is more difficult does not mean that it is impossible. We know for a fact that adults can and do become proficient with new languages and, although they may not internalize or process these new languages in the same way that young children do, they can nonetheless become competent speakers. Continued practice with a new language is a viable approach to becoming more fluent with it and, while some undoubtedly face greater difficulty mastering additional languages, there exist individuals who are capable of attaining fluency in new languages despite being adults.

I suggest that there is no reason to think that ritual learning cannot provide the same assistance for moral development later in life. Although learners may be poorly moralized

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<sup>227</sup> This is, of course, contingent upon how similar the developmental psychology involved in learning morality is to learning a language or some other skills. If we follow thinkers like Plato or Kant, for example, then moral development certainly involves a long and arduous process of maturation, especially with regard to one's capacity for reason. While I (and the Confucians) do take moral development to be a lifelong endeavor, I do think that psychosocial development may be more sensitive at certain points in one's life, and that moral development requires more than the development of rational faculties. These assumptions seem to be supported by the empirical literature considered throughout the project.

(let alone ritualized) going into a ritually oriented program of moral education, this does not preclude the possibility of their becoming more morally competent through continued practice. In point of fact, there is some reason to be skeptical of whether morality is something that cannot be taught beyond a certain developmental window. Although it is true that a lack of early socialization may inhibit future psychosocial development,<sup>228</sup> the development of moral competence does seem to be a lengthy process that covers a broad age range and may be accessible throughout an individual's lifetime. Specifically, while there is plenty of data to support the claim that emotions play an important role in moral development and that the ability to make the moral-immoral distinction occurs early in development, it does not follow that emotional responses compose the totality of moral competence or that moral development is limited to early childhood. As noted by Kristin Lagattuta and Drika Weller (2014), the transition from behaving according to convention to behaving according to moral reasoning occurs over a series of years, and a great deal of development in behavior associated with particularly moral reasoning seems to occur in later childhood and early adolescence (390-1).<sup>229</sup>

Finally, since morality is traditionally conceived as requiring moral agents to employ at least some level of reasoning and understanding of the nature of how their behavior is moral, we have reason to doubt that moral behavior hinges exclusively on

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<sup>228</sup> See for example Hastings, Utendale, and Sullivan (2007).

<sup>229</sup> Interestingly, it is during this same period of development that children seem to become less capable of language *acquisition*. If the "less is more" hypothesis is at all accurate, then the increase in sophistication and use of cognitive and metacognitive machinery, such as the capacity for conceptualization, not only coincides with the transition from acquiring to learning in language, but also the development of more sophisticated moral reasoning and behavior in humans. In fact, it may well be the case that the conceptual/metacognitive plays a very important role in moral competence alongside (or perhaps even above) the emotional and lower-level processes.



normal development during some critical period. This is excellent news for the ritual-based program in the context of adult education. Rituals, as prescriptions, help provide cues (or awareness of cues) for the initiation of particular protocols with regard to morally charged situations. This informs and helps facilitate the reasoning and behaviors in which humans engage during such situations. Even if the ability to develop a heightened affective sensitivity to these situations decreases with age, ritual can still at least facilitate the rational-behavioral process by providing widely accessible prescriptions. At worst, then, the concern about age is simply a problem for any instructional aid for moral education.

## 6.5 Conclusion

This chapter has addressed several concerns and limitations regarding ritual as a resource for moral education. I distinguished ritual from several other prominent resources currently in use within moral education, as well as acknowledged that there are certain contexts and audiences within which ritual will either be less effective or be completely ineffective. I suggested, however, that many of these shortcomings apply to all approaches to moral education, not just the ritual-based approach. The upshot of this project, then, is that there is reason to consider ritual as a resource for current programs in moral education. The notion of ritual that I have appropriated from the Confucian tradition can fulfill a distinct function as a sociocultural tool for moral development. Additionally, I suggest that it is possible to revitalize *treatment* of ritual as a central feature of our communities without necessarily becoming overly pedantic or culturally isolating.

This is all, of course, an argument that hinges upon a number of assumptions about human culture and psychology, and one that may not yet have sufficient empirical support. There is, however, at least some evidence to suggest that the positions I advance here are

plausible, such as the aforementioned findings supporting the existence of basic emotions and reflexive displays of said emotions.<sup>230</sup> What is needed, I suggest, is continued research into how moral development and education generally proceed, as well as new research examining how ritual can supplement these processes. There is already motivation for such pursuits: given the recent discovery that empathy can be primed in individuals with psychopathy,<sup>231</sup> for example, it is a topic of interest whether certain priming methods may be more or less effective in eliciting empathetic reactions from such individuals. If ritual is, indeed, a viable candidate as a tool for moral education, it might also serve as a viable tool for moral prompting – especially given the fact that at least a subset of rituals are developed around empathetic responses among humans. The takeaway, then, should be that while my recommendations regarding ritual are partly speculative, they are nonetheless also grounded in empirical findings that support seeing ritual as a promising resource for moral education.

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<sup>230</sup> See Chapter 2.

<sup>231</sup> See Meffert et al. (2013).

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

There are still many questions that I have not yet addressed, not the least of which is how one might design moral education programs incorporating ritual. In closing, I offer a prospective look at what sorts of issues still need to be addressed and, where possible, how we might start to apply a ritualized approach to moral education in a culture such as our own. In particular, I focus on three lines of enquiry: (1) How can rituals be employed to improve upon moral education? (2) How can we go about institutionalizing rituals and ritualizing classrooms? (3) How can we select or design rituals for moral education? Examining these questions will position us to launch future projects regarding ritual in moral education, including collaborative research with fields outside of philosophy.

A preliminary question that should be asked is how rituals can improve upon extant programs in moral education. Toward the beginning of the project, I offered a list of some of the benefits of moral education programs: reduction in antisocial, problematic behaviors, increased conflict resolution skills, and improved quality of coursework were all recorded as positive outcomes of student participation in moral education. If moral education programs currently on offer are capable of yielding such benefits, though, then why bother adding to something that is already doing so well? Why fix what is not broken?

I have two general reactions to this sort of question. First, simply because something works does not mean that it cannot be improved; this is as true for moral

education as it is for the manufacture of luxury automobiles. While the studies on the efficacy of moral education discussed earlier indicated desirable developments among participants, it might be the case that there are more effective means of instilling prosocial values and tendencies in students. Over the course of this dissertation, I gave reason to think that ritual can be effective in enacting these ends, one of the most telling examples being the findings of Beaudoin-Ryan and Goldin-Meadow (2014): subjects encouraged to employ gesture while engaging in resolving moral scenarios demonstrated markedly deeper understanding in their accounts than their non-gesturing counterparts.<sup>232</sup> I suggested that ritual might also be helpful in eliciting such sophistication in conflict resolution, since ritual often requires practitioners to engage in a number of gestures among other full-body activities. Along with other empirical findings documented in earlier chapters, this supports the idea that ritual could benefit and even improve upon extant moral education programs.

Second, it is important to recognize that, although *some* moral education pursuits have demonstrated (at least initial) success, such findings are not universal. Character-education-based programs, arguably the most popular form of moral education in the U.S. at present, have been criticized for a lack of theoretical consistency/objectivity among program structures (e.g., Leming 1993; Was, Woltz, and Drew 2006), an underdetermined philosophical account of what constitutes morality or “goodness” (Geren 2001; Kohn 1997), and insufficient data to support the claim that such programs reliably produce promoral attitudes and tendencies among participants (e.g., Davis 2003; Helwig, Turiel, and Nucci 1997). Perhaps most damningly, a 2010 report from the Institute of Education Sciences evaluated seven different U.S.-based social and character development programs

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<sup>232</sup> See Chapter 5 for additional details.

over a period of three years (2004-2007), only to find that there was no evidence that participants demonstrated any improvement with regard to moral/prosocial development when compared with their nonparticipating peers (XL-XLI). While these criticisms are limited in scope, applying only to character education programs, they nonetheless suggest that additional work is necessary if we intend to seriously invest in moral education programs as part of a general curriculum of psychosocial development.

What can an appeal to ritual do for ineffective moral education programs? Before answering this question, it is necessary to emphasize that the manner in which we proceed should be informed by rigorous examination of the faults of these programs. Do the programs fail due to a fundamental structural/theoretical deficiency in design, or could there be external issues (e.g., features of the target demographic) that inhibit some programs from being deployed effectively? Is there a generic structure for moral education programs that is efficacious, or do we need to tailor each program to the specific community to which it is being administered? The answers to these and related questions will influence how we insert ritual into moral education, but to obtain these answers we will need to engage in further research on (in)effective moral education programming.

This may prove to be a lengthy and difficult task: at present, many studies on the efficacy of moral education programs are, for practical reasons, limited to certain demographics (e.g., select school districts) and therefore may have limited implications. The aforementioned study by the Institute of Educational Sciences, for example, is the largest to date, yet it only covers seven programs over a period of three years. Additionally, given the wide variety of approaches to moral education currently on offer, findings with regard to one variety of, for example, character education may not be equally applicable to

findings regarding a program based around civics education. Accordingly, how ritual precisely might be usefully injected into such programs, or whether such programs are even defensible, remains an issue that we cannot ultimately resolve at this juncture. Nonetheless, these are questions that we should pursue, and at very least hypothesize about, if we are investigating utilizing ritual in moral education and, more importantly, committed to the cause of improving moral education as a whole.

Let us assume for the sake of argument that we have an understanding of the shortcomings of extant moral education programs, and agree that ritual can and should be integrated into the (salvageable) programs. The next issue to address regards the institutionalization of ritual. This matter is a practical one: moral education is an institution of a certain sort, and it is not necessarily clear how rituals might “fit” into the context of the classroom or school in general.<sup>233</sup> Earlier, I suggested that ritual, although often an important part of a culture, does not always feature prominently within a community; that is to say, ritual may be present, but it may not be a focus of attention or an object of concern. Currently, ritual is not a feature of moral education programs in U.S. public schools,<sup>234</sup> so we might expect that a radical overhaul of such programs will be necessary to accommodate ritual’s introduction as a resource for said programs. Such an assumption, however, does not seem to account for the fact that moral education programs take place within the general space of the school day, and this context may already involve a fair degree of ritualization that, if properly coopted, could ease the process of bringing ritual in

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<sup>233</sup> A separate issue regards moral education in non-school, non-classroom contexts. Due to the constraints of space, I will not address moral education in such domains, but I do believe that there is more that can (and should) be said regarding both moral education and ritual outside of the school/classroom.

<sup>234</sup> Schools with religious leanings may incorporate rituals into their curricula, but these are often religious rituals and may not be applicable outside the context of a particular denomination.

as a feature of moral education. In order to begin planning for how to institutionalize ritual for the purpose of moral education, then, I recommend beginning with an examination of the ways in which U.S. classrooms already are ritualized, if at all, and whether increasing ritualization can be of use to moral education.<sup>235</sup>

Admittedly, how exactly we can determine degree of ritualization poses a difficulty: there is no clear metric for gauging ritualization; one cannot measure how ritualized a classroom is in the same way that one can check its temperature. One area in which to start is with current work on ritual in the classroom. As mentioned in the introduction, Richard Quantz and his collaborators (1997, 2011) have written on the presence of ritual in the classroom and its applicability in improving upon extant pedagogy. A similar sentiment has been offered by Bryan Warnick (2010) who, drawing upon the remarks of R.S. Peters (1966, 1977, 1981a, 1981b) on ritual and education in the classroom, suggests that there might be ways in which ritual might be integrated into the classroom setting to make it compatible with a liberal education. Neither Quantz nor Warnick, however, suggest that ritual has been given any prominence in pedagogical training;<sup>236</sup> indeed, it is partially for this reason that both of them advocate ritual as a means of improving upon extant pedagogical theory and practice.<sup>237</sup> Such claims seem to be derived largely from a dearth of actual *studies* on classroom rituals: most writing on ritual in the classroom takes place at the theoretical level and does not examine whether or how rituals

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<sup>235</sup> By “ritualized” I mean the number of, the elaborateness of, and/or the focus on rituals.

<sup>236</sup> This is not to suggest that educational theorists have no interest in at least concepts/values related to ritual (e.g., as in the case of literature on classroom management).

<sup>237</sup> Several other educational theorists have also suggested that ritual could be a good way of reframing pedagogical issues. See, for example, Cornbleth (1986) (on teacher education reform), Bushnell (1997) (on parental involvement), and Van Voorhis (2004) (on homework).

are applied as part of teachers' pedagogies. Those articles that do seem to examine the application of ritual are frequently of small scale and anecdotal in nature (e.g., Ensign 1997, McCadden 1997); while interesting, they are decidedly lacking in rigor. As a result, generalization based upon them would be dubious.

That others have previously advocated introducing ritual (in some form) into the classroom is encouraging for my project. It also implies that the integration of ritual into moral education practices is feasible and, at least on a small scale, something that may already be occurring in certain classrooms. Remember, however, that the ambitions of this project are somewhat larger: looking at how ritual can be more generally institutionalized for the purpose of moral education programs. Moreover, the notion of "ritual" employed in the aforementioned research seems to be a rather vague one, and it is not clear that the term is being applied consistently.<sup>238</sup> Accordingly, one recommendation for future studies on extant classroom ritualization is that we: (a) establish a common understanding of ritual, as well as how to identify instances of it; (b) formalize a methodology for data collection, preferably one that provides more avenues for recording data than anecdotal reports alone; and (c) encourage collaboration among a more diverse collection and larger number of classrooms and institutions. Doing so would allow us to look for patterns of ritual that emerge in classroom settings, as well as the diversity of the rituals involved and how said diversity may or may not relate to other features of the classroom (e.g., student demographics, class size, subject matter, etc.). Such data would provide a more objective and useful look at how ritual is or is not being employed in U.S. classrooms.

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<sup>238</sup> Researchers often did not provide a definition of ritual in their discussion, attempted to coopt (loosely) Durkheimian and/or Turnerian notions of ritual, or simply posited some generic claims about ritual (e.g., ritual is meaning-making; ritual is formalized, repeated action; ritual is symbolic; etc.).



We can also employ these data to the end of figuring out how to institutionalize the sorts of rituals I address in my project for the specific purpose of moral education. Recall that I suggested defining ritual as “the prescriptions for those practices and standards in a community that embody (i.e., give form to) expressions of respect and related dispositions.” While I do not mean to suggest that this account of ritual is “correct” or “the only” notion of ritual that exists, it is the definition that best depicts the notion to which I am referring. Having the data from the aforementioned prospective studies, and understanding how ritual (as these researchers have construed it) is instantiated in classrooms can provide a better idea of how classrooms are ritualized and managed in general, and from this, we should be able to develop a way of integrating rituals of the sort I am describing into classrooms for the purpose of moral education in particular.

Once we have paved a path for integrating rituals into moral education pursuits, we are left with a daunting task: selecting and/or designing the rituals for our programs. Before proceeding too far along this line, I should point out that the latter option (i.e., designing wholly new rituals) is probably unnecessary and ineffective. While it is certainly possible to design new rituals for moral education, there is no need to do so when there are already extant practices that could be elevated to the level of educational rituals. Consider the practice of raising a hand to request an opportunity to speak in a classroom setting: while this practice is a common convention, it is also an important ritual in helping to establish a dynamic of respectful interactions between teachers and students in the space of the school. If this proves to be an effective means of encouraging the respectful dynamic and, in turn, prosocial, promoral behavior in general, then it could be said that such an existing convention has been successfully recruited into the moral education process as a ritual.

Furthermore, presumably we want rituals utilized in the context of the classroom to be continuous with general social practices to ensure the transferability of moral education. As discussed earlier, many cultures already possess a variety of rituals, and at least some of these rituals fit the definition to which I have been appealing throughout the project (i.e., the prescriptions for those practices and standards in a community that embody expressions of respect and related dispositions). If ritual is as important for the perpetuation and maintenance of moral dispositions within a community as I have postulated, then unless we encounter a community in which members are completely incapable of consistently expressing respect and humanitarian attitudes through a shared collection of behaviors, we should be suspicious of the need for all new rituals. One of the issues I noted, however, is that sometimes, rituals are not focal points of the culture in general, let alone moral education curricula. By bringing such rituals to the forefront, then, we can supplement moral education programs with additional resources for inculcating promoral dispositions in students that will also be applicable throughout the general community. It might be necessary to slightly modify the rituals for the sake of making them more salient within the program (although at the time of writing I do not see a strong case for this), but generating all new rituals seems both unnecessary and potentially counterproductive.

If we are to draw upon extant rituals, then, how are we to select them? To begin, I suggest first returning to the specific notion of ritual with which I am operating: the prescriptions for those practices and standards in a community that embody expressions of respect and related dispositions. Keeping this in mind will help us to delineate the rituals that are relevant to moral education from those that are not (e.g., a practice of turning lights on and off due to compulsive tendencies). Using this account of ritual as a metric, and via

collaboration with experts in other fields (e.g., psychology, sociology, and anthropology), we can begin to identify the rituals (or at least classes of rituals) with which we can populate moral education programs.

This is a good first step toward identifying the rituals we will want to integrate, but additional filters are still necessary. As noted in the fifth chapter, although I am deriving my account of ritual from the Confucian notion, I also need to distance the account from elements of the very same tradition. This is, in part, due to the fact that the Confucian tradition includes a number of sociomoral precepts that we may not wish to adopt. This concern extends to rituals from any culture/belief set: they may espouse/reflect/represent values and/or attitudes that we do not desire as parts of our idealized moral education programs. We must, therefore, examine the rituals that we are considering based on the values and dispositions that we hope to inculcate.

This is a philosophically interesting issue with regard to the account of ritual with which we are working, especially given its focus upon respect as a core attitude of expression/inculcation. Thus far, I have spoken of respect in rather general terms; in point of fact, however, respect admits of a plurality of notions.<sup>239</sup> Consider, for example, the distinction between the respect one might hold for a talented artist and a respect for human rights: the first case might be conceived in terms of esteem or admiration, as one is impressed by the person and regards them as exemplary in his/her craft; the second case involves a slightly different attitude, what we might think of as something like approbation, as one regards human rights as a policy by which one should abide. Variety among kinds of respect is also present within the Confucian tradition from which I have abstracted my

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<sup>239</sup> For an overview of several recent accounts of taxa of respect, see Dillon (2014).

notion of ritual. In the third chapter, I suggested that respect in Confucianism (at base) involves acknowledging, valuing, and responding accordingly to not only a person's worth, but also the worth of his or her projects. How that respect is conveyed, and its contents, vary depending upon features of one's relationship to others (e.g., respect is shown to a parent as filiality, but respect is shown to a sibling as fraternity). Thus, even within a tradition, we might find that respect admits of a plurality.

On the one hand, this fact about respect is innocuous. That we have varying forms of respect does not prevent us from functioning as stable, even harmonious communities.<sup>240</sup> In fact, different forms of respect may even be conducive to such harmony: respect for a superior or instructor simply is different from the respect that one shows to a colleague or peer, and maintaining certain boundaries as part of demonstrating this respect contributes to maintaining a functional space of practice (be it a classroom, office, or even a sporting event). A pluralism about respect, then, is arguably healthy and even necessary, and we should expect the rituals employed in moral education to accommodate this pluralism.

On the other hand, we should also be wary of the fact that certain notions of respect might not be conducive to the system of moral education that we hope to develop. For example, in the United States, moral frameworks are typically built around philosophically liberal ideals such as democracy, fairness, and general egalitarianism.<sup>241</sup> Not all varieties of respect, or modes of expressing it, are conducive to such frameworks. In Confucianism, for example, the sometimes rigid, hierarchical system of divisions inherent in the notion of

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<sup>240</sup> Even varying moral systems need not pose opposition, provided they fall within certain parameters. See Wong (2006) for an account and defense of moral "pluralistic relativism."

<sup>241</sup> John Dewey (1909) appears to have this thought in his discussion of the relationship between education, the individual learner, and the community.

ritual utilized by Xunzi might not be compatible with liberal, democratic ideals. A similar example from Western culture manifests in the notion of chivalry, as well as notions of respect derived from religious laws and customs (e.g., halakha, sharia, catechism, etc.). It is not obvious that these notions of respect, and their accompanying rituals, would (or could) fit within the parameters of the liberal framework that a U.S.-based moral education program would hope to inculcate. This applies not only to notions of respect, but also to the promoral values to which said notions attach (e.g., filiality, fraternity, equality, etc.).

Accordingly, as we select rituals, we will need to do so against a backdrop of values that we have selected based on their conduciveness to a particular moral framework. This may require a constrained value pluralism. Developing the constraints for such pluralism, as well as examining its applications and ramifications, are both well beyond the bounds of this project. Given the importance of such projects, however, they should remain additional matters for investigation in future research on ritual's utility for moral education.

Despite the uncertainties posed by these questions, I do not think that we should shrink away from utilizing ritual as a tool for moral education, especially considering that (in principle) there do not appear to be any negatives associated with utilizing ritual as a tool. Additionally, as I have argued throughout the dissertation, we have very good reason to think that ritual can perform a number of functions that make it an ideal resource for helping learners to cultivate promoral dispositions. In fact, it is arguable that we have at least as much reason to think that ritual can benefit moral education programs as other instructional tools (e.g., surveys, clickers, social media, etc.) for general education. While the specifics of how to employ ritual remain uncertain, then, we should be optimistic about ritual's ability to inculcate morality and continue researching and exploring this possibility.

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